

BLACK CATHEDRAL – Behind the Scenes

A behind the scenes look at how the book began, was written, and why it seems to have intrigued the powers that be...

When it says 'I' or 'me' it really means us and we, but although we write as a partnership we really are two people and I can't speak for him no more than he can speak for me. This is my take on the making of Black Cathedral... whichever one of us that might be.

Black Cathedral began as a man running over the top of a hill. Obviously being pursued by something, the terror was pinched into his face. His breath was all but used up; he clearly wasn't the fittest man, and running, especially with an apparently damaged leg, had taken its toll. With a desperate glance over his shoulder he sank behind a shrubby bush, panting like an animal chased by a pack.

If it was a movie, the close up would show his frightened eyes, then pull away to his sweat drenched face, his tattered clothes. The camera would hover upwards, taking in the clump of trees, the scree covered path he had taken. Then the angle would widen out and the full expanse of the island he was on would be shown, the cold sea pulling at the small stone beach, the trees of a wood, bent and seeking shelter from the wind.

And in the distance was a small, possibly abandoned church. The camera would peel away from the man, seeking out entrance to this abandoned holy place.

But not before the man felt something grab his leg; something that came out of the ground next to him. He would feel the leg begin to be pulled towards the earth, and then his face would show disbelief, not at the pain tearing at the leg, but at the fact that the leg seemed to be absorbed into the ground.

That was the single scene that started the novel. The scene had to be fleshed out and so the idea of a management bonding exercise gone wrong was born. I've been on enough of them to know that they never achieve what the management wanted them to – bind individuals into a single corporate entity to make productivity and results improve. They do give work colleagues plenty of awkward moments sharing far too much with people they aren't that friendly with. Most end up drinking too much, staying up far too late, and sometimes trying to be far too friendly to people they really shouldn't. I have never been on one where everyone dies though – to be fair.

So a lot of people have had a harsh fate on a harsh island. Why?

That's where the plotting came in. As opposed to amplifying an opening scene we had to create a back story, and populate it with characters. We had to follow up what was a good ending – the multiple deaths. We had to have a story that lived around the plot. We had to make suspense, intrigue, love (not make love as in... what I mean is we had to have a love interest as a counter balance to the horror the two characters enter into). We wanted to have a theme that the book

could exist around, with a central idea that one of the characters could use to prove a theory he already had.

What we didn't expect was that Ley lines would become an integral part of the plot. Even more unexpected was the way the Roman Catholic Church became a player.

The mechanics of the writing were that one of us wrote the opening scene and some overlaying ones. We considered making it a novella. We considered *Distorted Deviations* as a title, but we do better titles than that so that idea soon fell in the trash.

The other one then took that opening, moved it to later in the book, and began to construct a novel based on one of the themes of the book. At around halfway they got stuck.

The other one then read it through. Revised thoroughly by expanding scenes, adding new ones, and widening the scope of the book with Leys and Catholics. Most of the other aspects were there already, the US Corporation, the Sorority, the marriage issues. What was also there, but only half mentioned, was Department 18.

Department 18 exists so far as we know. In Whitehall in London, near where the Guards in their Bearskin hats and the Changing Of the Guard and Buckingham Palace all get photographed every day, are some palatial offices where tea does get drunk, and investigations do take place.

We didn't realise by mentioning it in our novel that there would be quite such a fuss. We didn't think when we got our website www.maynard-sims.com transformed that linking to the www.dept18.com website would mean attention on this scale.

When the book was written it was read through several times and checked daily for weeks looking for continuity errors, poor phrasing, basic writing skills. Off to Don, contracts, cover, soon proofing, promotional pdf, promotional postcards...

Black Cathedral has begun something with Department 18. the next novel seems to feature them as well.