

# Canadian, with a twist

*Author fuses Chandler, Hillerman*

*Suspended Sentences*

by Jim Napier

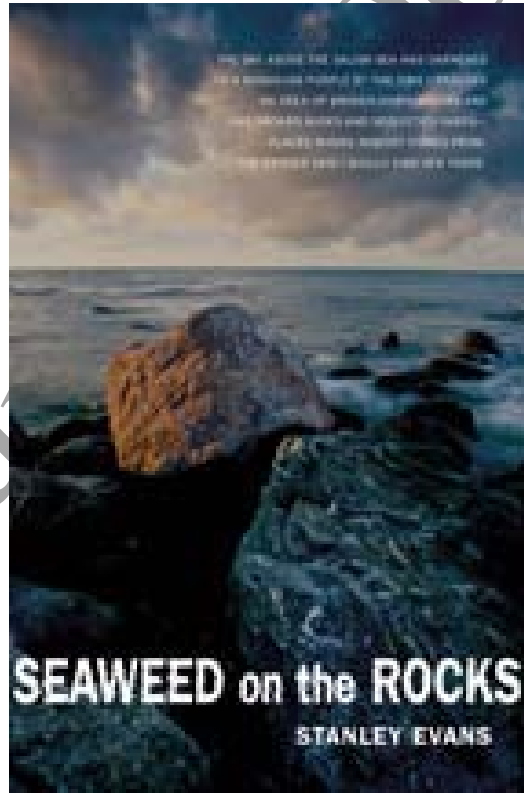
What the natives of British Columbia call the Salish Sea includes the waters of the Straits of Georgia and San Juan de Fuca, together with those of Puget Sound. It encompasses Vancouver Island as well, which according to native lore broke off from a larger mass that was originally home to all native peoples. No wonder, then, that to the founding peoples of Vancouver Island it is still a special place, home to their ancestors.

To First Nations cop Silas Seaweed the island also holds a special meaning: it is where he goes about his work, trying to enforce the white man's laws while restoring dignity to the lives of his brothers and sisters who sometimes find themselves adrift and overwhelmed in an alien culture. Like the marine life teaming near the shores, Silas sometimes finds himself swimming against the tide.

## *Stanley Evans*

Born in Lancashire, England, Stanley Evans came to Canada in 1954, and was soon attracted by the beauty of Vancouver Island. By turns a soldier, a surveyor, and a deep-sea fisherman, he once spent several months travelling the Amazon River and its tributaries. After serving many years as a college instructor he decided to take up writing. Beginning his literary career writing for newspapers and magazines, he published his debut historical mystery novel,

*Outlaw Gold* in 1996, and followed that a year later with *Snow-Coming Moon*.



In 2005 Evans began his hard-boiled series featuring Native American police detective Silas Seaweed. *Seaweed on the Street* was followed by *Seaweed on Ice* (2006, optioned for a movie) and *Seaweed under Water* (2007). His most recent novel, *Seaweed on the Rocks*, was published in 2008. Evan's next novel, *Seaweed in the Soup*, is scheduled to be released in September.

Evans and his wife have four grown children, and live in Victoria, B.C.

### ***Seaweed on the Rocks***

**(Touchwood Editions, 2008)**

Responding to an anonymous tip, Victoria PD detective Silas Seaweed leaves the city and drives up the island to Donnelly's Marsh, where he finds two drugged-out squatters in an abandoned house. A crack addict he recognizes manages to escape, but his accomplice isn't so lucky: the woman is unconscious and near death. Silas calls for an ambulance and administers mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. It's a calculated risk: he knows she is a likely candidate for both Hepatitis C and HIV.

After she is packed off to the hospital Silas learns that the overdose wasn't accidental. Silas takes a personal interest in the case, and he vows to find out why someone was trying to kill the young native woman.

Before long he discovers that the two had recently burgled the office of a local hypnotherapist named Lawrence Trew. They came away with a tape recorder, and Trew himself had disappeared soon afterwards. The trail leads Silas to a local pawnbroker, Titus Silverman, but he too is among the missing.

Silas learns that among Trew's clients is a striking, half-native woman named Charlotte Fox. She says she had been getting grief counseling from Trew following the death of her father, a wealthy white businessman from Alberta. Silas is attracted to Charlotte, but a few days later, when he returns to the marsh where he found the crack addicts, he is in for a couple of surprises: there is a ceremony taking place in an abandoned longhouse, only it's unlike anything Silas has ever seen before.

And Charlotte Fox's Lexus is parked nearby.

### ***Like a painting by Emily Carr***

Combining riveting first-person immediacy with gritty realism, *Seaweed on the Rocks* is, at first glance, reminiscent of the hard-boiled classics of Raymond Chandler, a virtue in itself sufficient to earn him a place in the hearts of crime fiction fans. But Evans brings another card to the table: like the late Tony Hillerman, Evans deftly wraps his tale in a richly evocative portrait of native lore, grounded in a belief in the supernatural:

*I heard—or thought that I heard—somebody open a door at the back of the house...Light from a window set high in the kitchen wall revealed heavy dark counters, wooden shelving, a white enamel sink and a lot of dust. A loaf of bread was turning black atop an old-fashioned icebox.*

*Suddenly the light in the kitchen dimmed as something appeared outside the window. A massive grizzly bear was standing on its hind legs and staring straight at me. The bear's head, covered with dark reddish fur, seemed a yard wide and filled the whole window frame. Before I could reconcile this improbably apparition with my normal cognitive functions, it had vanished.*

*As my eyes adjusted to the gloom, I saw Marnie Paul sprawled in a kitchen chair. She was wearing a black leather jacket and black cotton pants, and the rest of her was just thinly fleshed bones, lip rings and earrings. She had meth mouth—rotten teeth and lips covered with blisters and sores*

*from sharing hot crack pipes with other meth addicts—and her fingernails were blue from cyanosis. Two years earlier Marnie Paul had been a healthy Coast Salish high school student. Now she looked older than Hector Latour. Her eyes were closed and she was apparently dead, but I felt for a pulse. It was barely discernible. I lifted her off the chair and laid her on the gritty floor.*

*Seaweed on the Rocks* is as uniquely Canadian as a painting by Emily Carr, and just as fascinating. Weaving a tautly-plotted story around such disparate elements as a couple of drug-crazed dropouts, a missing pawnbroker, a beautiful native woman, and a mysterious creature that keeps reappearing requires real discipline to carry it off, and Stanley Evans succeeds admirably. The result is an original and entertaining novel that will appeal to a wide variety of readers. I recommend it highly.

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