

Art imitates life?

Political farce lampoons Ottawa

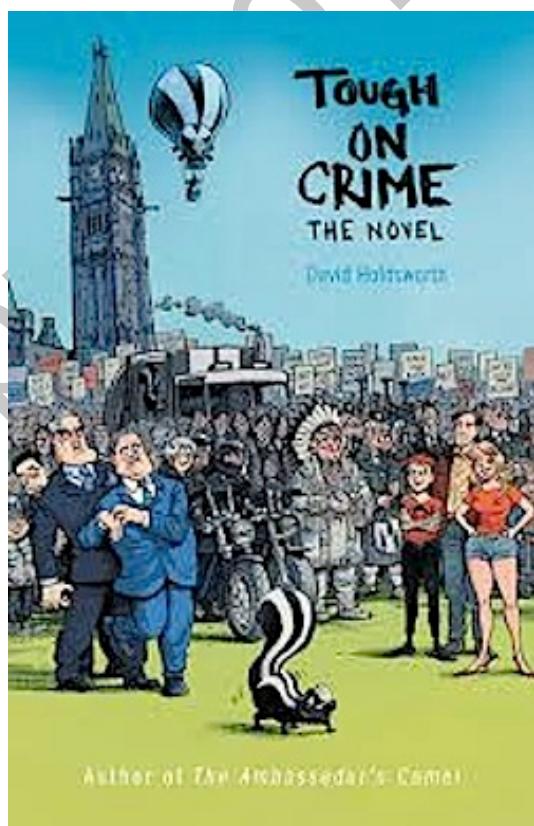
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

Close on the heels of Canada's recent election comes a romp through the corridors of power that might leave readers wondering whether art imitates life or vice-versa. Could it be that the author – a person of some considerable experience in Canadian government – was inspired by actual political personalities? Not for me to say. But I can promise that whatever your political persuasion you'll find lots to laugh at – and some sobering food for thought – in Ottawa author David Holdsworth's latest political parody, *Tough on Crime*.

Charlie Backhouse is a newly-elected MP representing Calgary. He's just been appointed Minister of Crime and Punishment in Lawrence Chamberlain's government, and the PM has a very special task for him. Having squeaked into office with the barest of majorities, Chamberlain has decided on a strategy to boost his support among the populace: he will adopt a policy of being tough on crime, first by creating a climate of fear among the public, and then by cranking up the enforcement of Canadian laws. Naturally, this will require building new prison facilities across Canada, to house the wrongdoers once they've been convicted in court. It's an ambitious plan, and Charlie

Backhouse, new to the game and all-too-willing to do whatever his PM asks, is just the man for the job.



Chamberlain instructs Backhouse to launch his plan at the Canada Day festivities held annually in Riverdale, Quebec, a small village half an hour northwest of Ottawa. The residents don't know it, but their region has been chosen as the site for the very first supermax prison – in fact it will be located in the nearby Gatineau

Park, crown jewel of the Canadian park system.

There's just one difficulty: the cantankerous residents of Riverdale don't want a prison in their back yard. When she learns of the plan, their feisty mayor, Margaret O'Brien, mounts a national campaign to oppose the PM's scheme. She carefully conceals the fact that Maplewood Manor, Riverdale's very own retirement home, has a substantial grow-op on the premises, the enterprise being aimed at raising funds for the home's expansion. Margaret declares war on the arrogant PM, and enlists in the battle an eclectic assortment of town oddballs, including hot-air balloonist and

bagpiper Willy McGurk and Farley Crabtree, the town garbage collector, who uses his rounds to distribute the retirement home's illicit pot crop to local consumers.

It all makes for a rollicking comedy of errors, in which the normally laid-back residents of a picturesque small town are pitted against the formidable buttoned-down forces of the Prime Minister's Office, a classic case of Might versus Right. No surprises for guessing who will prevail, but I guarantee that along the way readers will be treated to an entertaining (and not wholly unbelievable) take on politics Canadian style. *Tough on Crime* is published by Friesen Press.

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetinger*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January magazine*, the *Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning crime fiction site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

