

# Canadian Crime Writers, I: *weirdos in the wilderness*

## *Suspended Sentences*

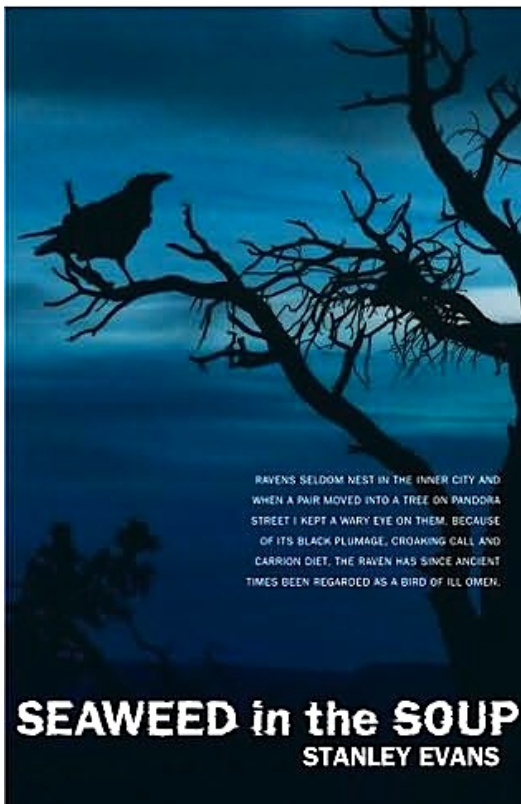
by Jim Napier

It's a cliché – and like many clichés, false – that the reading public is not interested in Canadian settings, much less rural ones. Canada's West Coast provides a rich variety of settings that have been skillfully exploited by some of our best writers, and it's no accident that next month Canada's annual crimefest, Bloody Words, is being held in Victoria. In celebration of that fact this week's column focuses on crime fiction set – at least partly – in the wilderness of our westernmost province, British Columbia.

**Stanley Evans,**  
***Seaweed in the Soup***  
(Touchwood Editions, 2009)

It's been far too long since I last reviewed Stanley Evans. One of Canada's most distinctive writers, his literary voice is reminiscent of the hard-boiled authors of the past, but placed in a contemporary and unique setting. Evans' stories revolve around Silas Seaweed, a First Nations cop from the Salish tribe based in Victoria, B.C. In the fifth in his series, *Seaweed in the Soup*, a series of murders plagues the capital city, and Silas believes they're related to an upsurge in gang violence. But before he can run the villains to ground Silas finds himself on the defensive, with allegations of misdeeds clouding his past. His efforts to clear himself and solve the killings will lead him from the deceptively-tranquil streets of Victoria to Desolation Sound, an eerily breathtaking setting off Vancouver Island's northwest shores.

Without a doubt one of the strongest Canadian crime writers around, Evans' stories combine finely-crafted plots infused with native lore, rich characters and crackling dialogue, all wrapped around an atmospheric writing style that makes the reader yearn for more. Read him once, you'll read him again.





**Donald J. Hauka,**  
*She Demons*  
(Dundurn, 2010)

Journalist Donald J. Hauka has published two previous crime novels, both with impressive results: *Mr Jinnah: Securities* was adapted for television and broadcast on the CBC in 2003; and his *Jinnah on Crime: Pizza 911* was nominated for a Gemini Best Movie award. Drawing on his own experience, his protagonist is a journalist for a Vancouver newspaper. Hakeen Jinnah is an Indo-Canadian, and assigned to the crime beat he is armed with a measured take on life. He's seen it all, but somehow manages to retain his sense of humour — albeit dark — as he wanders among Vancouver's downtrodden and out-of-luck. In his third foray, *She Demons*, Jinnah is called to a crime scene in the heart of the homeless: a

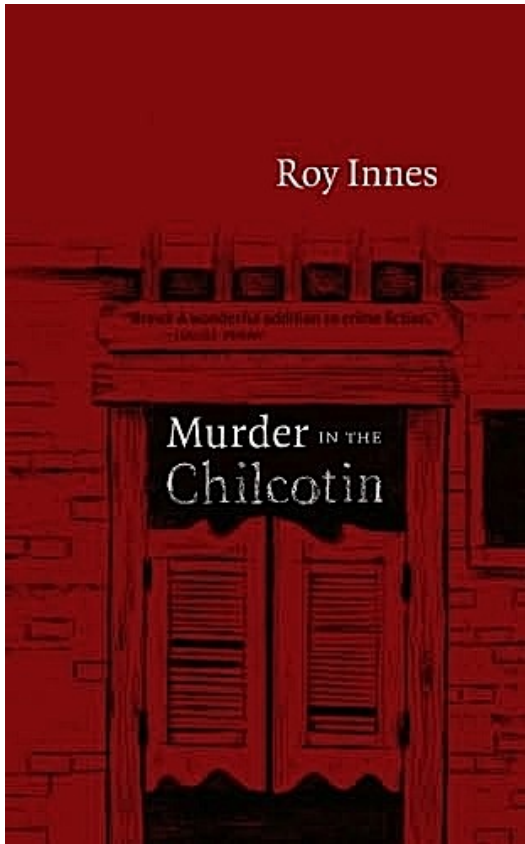
young man, Thad Golway, has been beheaded and his face carved with some curious patterns. It doesn't take long for Jinnah to discover that the markings are the signs of an American drug gang hitherto unknown in Canada, and he sets off in quest of an exclusive story. But Jinnah's treading on dangerous ground, and when the case takes an unexpected turn not even a friend on the force can prevent the violence from striking close to home.

A humorous thriller sounds like an contradiction in terms, but as a journalist himself Hauka is no stranger to dark comedy. Jinnah battles with his wife, their son, his editor, the police, a TV news reporter and a bible-quoting reformer while grappling with Thad's death and the disappearance of his friend. *She Demons* is an entertaining tale with a fast-moving plot and dialogue peppered with repartee. The result is a light and original read that signals more good things to come from this talented author.

**Roy Innes,**  
*Murder in the Chilcotin*  
(NuWest Press, 2010)

The third novel in an engrossing series, *Murder in the Chilcotin* opens when the body of a young Mountie is discovered in his torched cruiser in the woods of the West Cariboo District, halfway between Vancouver and Prince George. The victim is the son of a local rancher, who's all too anxious to take matters into his own hands. RCMP Inspector Mark Coswell and the newly-promoted Sergeant Paul Blakemore are hampered when their investigation begins to focus on two native brothers, the sons of the local Chief. Before it is ended, long-simmering racial tensions threaten to boil over, and it's up to the pair to try to

keep a lid on things while bringing the killer, or killers, to justice.



*Among the Departed* (Poisoned Pen Press, 2011), and Debra Purdy Kong, *The Opposite of Dark* (Touchwood Editions, 2011).

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An insightful portrayal of native life, *Murder in the Chilcotin* is brimming with plausible suspects and a genuine feel for bush life. The characters are well-drawn and engaging, and there is no shortage of red-herrings. If you enjoy well-crafted bush mysteries, Roy Innes is a writer to watch for.

Noteworthy as these books are, the above list only scratches the surface of West Coast Canadian crime writing, and in the limited space of this column I cannot begin to do justice to the many fine crime writers who set their tales in Western Canada. If you are taken by the rich settings that lend themselves to distinctive plots, I recommend asking your bookseller for the following works: Lou Allin, *She Felt No Pain* (Rendez-Vous Crime, 2010), Vicki Delany,