

Scarnum on the Rocks

Debut novel features engaging sleuth

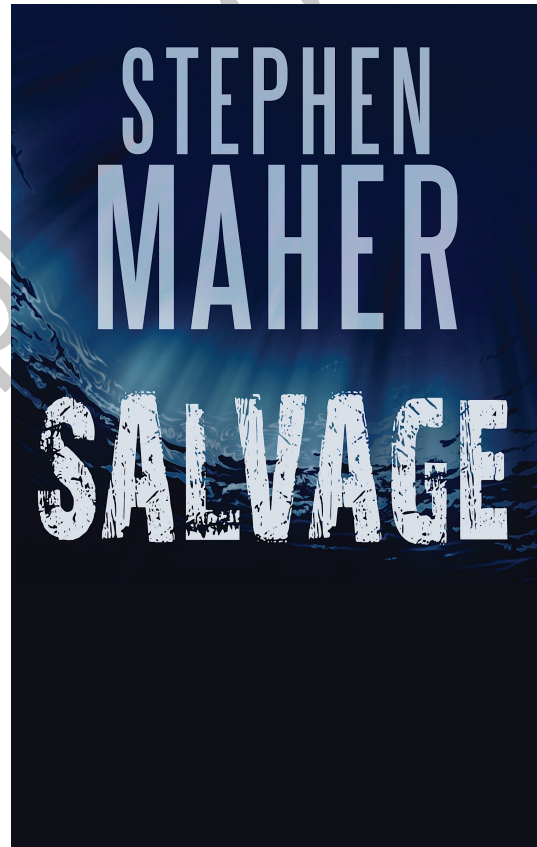
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

In the midst of a raging winter storm off the coast of Newfoundland, local fisherman Phillip Scarnum is returning to port on his schooner, *Cerebus*, when he spots a boat foundering on a deadly outcropping of rocks known as the Sambro Ledges. The storm is in full flight, and it's just about all Scarnum can do to keep his own boat afloat and off the rocky shoals. He's alone, and in a bad position to help others. Yet he reckons there may be some other poor bugger out there, listening to his own boat being pounded by the rocks, and scared for his very life. And if the other boat is deserted and he could manage to board her in the rough seas and tow her into port, Scarnum would be in line for a healthy salvage fee. So Scarnum steers for the stricken craft, putting his own boat, and his life, at mortal risk.

Battling both the relentless waves and the jagged rocks Scarnum manages to secure a line and pull the other boat, the *Kelly Lynn*, off the shoals, towing it into the small port where he anchors his own craft. When he goes aboard to check for life, he finds the boat deserted. A friend phones the Coast Guard, who says no boat has been reported missing. It looks as though the salvage rights will earn Scarnum anywhere between a quarter

and half of the boat's replacement value—an amount Scarnum could sorely use. He meets with a local lawyer and files a statement detailing his recovery of the craft.



A registry search turns up the *Kelly Lynn*'s owner: it's a local bigwig named Bobby Falkenham. Ironic news for Scarnum: seven years earlier he'd caught the man with his own lover, Karen, and not surprisingly, it had led to the breakup of their relationship.

Things get even murkier when Scarnum is awakened in the early hours of the morning to discover that someone is trying to board the Kelly Lynn. He scares the person away, forcing the intruder to abandon his canoe. Recovering it, Scarnum discovers nearly a dozen waterproof bags, which leads him to search the Kelly Lynn again, this time more carefully. What he finds moves a routine salvage operation into a whole new category, involving the RCMP: there are bullet holes in the hull of the Kelly Lynn; and when Jimmy Zinck, a local fisherman, is

found to be missing, murder is suspected, and the RCMP regard Phillip Scarnum as their prime suspect.

In *Salvage* Ottawa journalist Stephen Mayer has delivered a fast-paced, atmospheric, and compelling thriller. A former Maritimer himself, Maher has an acute ear for Newfoundland dialect, and his characters seem to step off the page. The plot is utterly believable, and crime fiction fans will find much to like in Maher's engaging protagonist. Let's hope it's the first in a series.

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Jim Napier is a professional crime-fiction reviewer based in Canada. Since 2005 he has published over 500 book reviews and author interviews in several Canadian newspapers and on multiple websites, and his own novel, *Legacy*, is scheduled to appear in the Spring. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com



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