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# A unique world view

From journalist to author, Islander John Cairns has drawn on his varied life experiences to write *High Degree of Atrocity*, a novel set in Hong Kong, which he now calls home

BY SALLY COLE  
THE GUARDIAN

John Cairns grew up watching the world unfold around him.

Whether he was studying history and political studies at UPEI or feeding the cows on his father's dairy farm in Lower Freetown, he always had a unique perspective.

"I was a fan of the animals and I'm certain that if I had ever gone into farming no animals would ever have been sold," says the UPEI graduate who now makes Hong Kong home.

Above all else, he saw himself as an observer of the world around him.

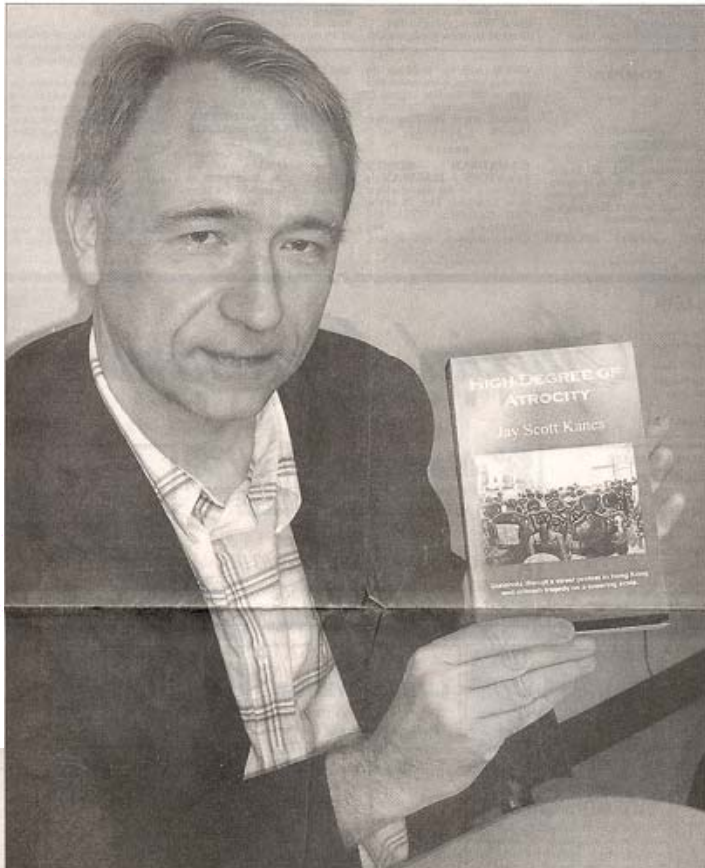
"Watching is something I've done all my life. I think it's very difficult to be a journalist unless you have a desire to observe," says Cairns, who worked as a reporter at the *Sault Star* in Ontario and the *Leader Post* in Regina before moving to Hong Kong in time to witness the return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 after being a British colony.

As he watched and waited, he wrote for several magazines.

"The change of sovereignty came. There was no big political upheaval at the time, but there were changes.

"The new administration rolled back some of the democratic reforms that the last governor had tried to institute. And the economy went bad.

"The property market crashed and Asian currencies ran into a lot of trouble," says Cairns, whose interest in Hong Kong politics inspired him to write a futuristic novel.



GUARDIAN PHOTO BY SALLY COLE

Prince Edward Island native John Cairns is a Canadian journalist who moved to Hong Kong in time to experience the return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Using the pen name Jay Scott Kanes, he's written a futuristic novel.

*High Degree of Atrocity* is set in his adopted city in 2009. The novel begins with an assassination while protesters march through the streets of Hong Kong to demand full democracy and gunshots unleash the city's worst nightmare — soldiers brandishing weapons and creating fear on crowded streets.

"The book emerged from observations of Hong Kong, its problems and fears.

"At the moment, the biggest issue in Hong Kong is that the

great majority of people want a greater degree of democracy," says Cairns.

Writing under the pen name of Jay Scott Kanes, Cairns tracks the after effects of the murder of two important figures during a street demonstration to oust the country's unpopular chief executive.

"Prior to resigning from my full-time job to write things like this, I was working for a quasi-government organization called the Hong Kong Trade and Development

Council," he says.

Spending his days writing promotional material, he felt like a spin doctor.

"Frankly, I built up a lot of frustration writing promotional material, so that the book became a big release for that," he says.

Cairns, who participated in the annual march for democracy, is concerned that Hong Kong may experience a similar situation to the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989.

"If you extrapolate from the present situation and think about things that could happen, what the consequences could be and what would follow from that, you can get to that point, which is what I've done with this novel," he says.

The Tiananmen Square protests were a set of national protests in the People's Republic of China which occurred in Beijing in 1989. The focus of the protests was the occupation of the square by college and university students advocating democratic reforms.

"Certainly, everyone hopes that it won't happen, that things won't go quite that far.

"But people have strong feelings that they want better government as well as democratic reform. And the Chinese government — the central government — is standing in the way of that, so it's very much a road block. And there is no solution in sight at the moment. So anything might happen," he says.

Copies of his book are available at Island bookstores.