

A dramatic sunset over a dark, choppy sea. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, with a bright orange and yellow glow from the setting sun on the horizon. Two small, dark structures are visible on the horizon line. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

A NOVEL

THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR

AUTHOR OF THE
NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER
SAVAGES

DON WINSLOW



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DON WINSLOW, a former private investigator and consultant, is the author of more than a dozen novels, including *The Dawn Patrol*, *The Power of the Dog*, and *The Death and Life of Bobby Z*. The film adaptation of *Savages*, directed by Oliver Stone, is set for a 2012 release. He lives in Southern California. For more, visit www.donwinslow.com.

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BOONE DANIELS LIVES TO SURF.

Laid back, ultra-California cool, the former cop turned PI begins each day with the Dawn Patrol, a close-knit group of surfers, best friends who not only ride waves together but have one another's backs out of the water. It's the life Boone loves, all he wants. To him, "There's no such thing as a bad day at the beach." So when one of their own is murdered—especially an icon like Kelly Kuhio, a local hero—and another surfer, a young punk from the Rockpile Crew, stands accused, the small world of Pacific Beach is rocked to its core.

Boone knows he can no longer ignore the painful truth that violence is seeping into the surfing community. But when he agrees to help the defense, the outrage he courts from the community, and the Dawn Patrol, is more than he ever anticipated. He's risking losing the relationships that define his life—just when he needs them most.

As Boone digs deeper into San Diego's murkier side, delving into places the city's reputation-conscious establishment would rather he left alone, it becomes clear that more than a murder case is at stake. He soon finds himself out there alone, struggling to stay afloat as the waves get rougher and rougher . . . and more deadly. It's *The Gentlemen's Hour*—and it could be Boone's last.

PRAISE FOR **SAVAGES**

"A revelation. . . **Every bit as savage as its title.** This is *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* on autoloop."

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—BRENDAN LEONARD, *January Magazine*



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Isle of Joy
While Drowning in the Desert
A Long Walk Up the Water Slide
Way Down on the High Lonely
The Trail to Buddha's Mirror
A Cool Breeze on the Underground

THE GENTLEMEN'S HOUR

DON WINSLOW

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In memory of Stephen J. Cannell, a true gentleman

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*But I don't need that much
Sunshine in my cup,
No, I don't need that much. . . .*
—Nick Hernandez, Common Sense, “Sugar in My Cup”

1

Kansas.

See “flatter than.”

Like the ocean this August morning in Pacific Beach, San Diego, California.

Aka Kansas.

As the Dawn Patrol gives way to the Gentlemen’s Hour.

2

Earth, air, fire, and water.

The four elements, right?

Let's let air go for a minute—except in LA, it's pretty much a given. Fire's not the topic either—for now, anyway.

Leaving earth and water.

They have more in common than you'd think.

For example, they can both look static on the surface, but there's always something going on underneath. Like water, earth is always moving. You can't necessarily see it, you might not feel it, but it's happening anyway. Beneath our feet, tectonic plates are shifting, faults are widening, quakes are tuning up to rock and roll.

So that dirt we're standing on, "solid ground"?

It's moving beneath us.

Taking us for a ride.

Face it—whether we know it or not, we're all always surfing.

3

Boone Daniels lies face up on his board like it's an inflatable mattress in a swimming pool.

He's half asleep. The sun that warms his closed eyes is already burning off the marine layer relatively early in the morning. He's out there as usual with the Dawn Patrol—Dave the Love God, High Tide, Johnny Banzai, Hang Twelve—even though there's no surf to speak of and nothing to do except talk story. The only regular not present for duty is Sunny Day, who's in Oz on the Women's Professional Surfing Tour and also making a video for Quiksilver.

It's boring—the torpid dog days of late summer, when Pacific Beach is overrun with tourists, when most of the locies have basically sung “See you in September,” and the ocean itself can't work up the energy to produce a wave.

“Kansas,” Hang Twelve complains.

Hang Twelve, thusly glossed because he has a dozen toes—fortunately six on each foot—is the junior member of the Dawn Patrol, a lost pup that Boone took under his arm when the kid was about thirteen. White as a Republican National Committee meeting, he sports Rastafarian dreadlocks and a red retro-beatnik goatee, and despite or perhaps because of his parents' many acid trips, he's an idiot savant with a computer.

“Have you ever been to Kansas?” Johnny Banzai asks, sounding a little aggro. He doubts that Hang has ever been east of Interstate 5.

“No,” Hang answers. He's never been east of Interstate 5. “Then how do you know?” Johnny presses, in full-on interrogator mode now. “For all you know, Kansas could be covered with mountain ranges. Like the Alps.”

“I know there's no surf in Kansas,” Hang Twelve says stubbornly, because he's almost certain there's no ocean in Kansas, unless maybe it's the Atlantic, in which case there's probably no surf either.

“There's no surf in San Dog,” Boone offers. “Not today, anyway.”

Dave, lying on his stomach, lifts his head off the board and pukes into the water. Again. Boone and Dave have been boys since elementary school, so Boone has seen Dave hung over many, many times, but not quite like this.

Last night was “Mai Tai Tuesday” at The Sundowner.

“You gonna live?” Boone asks him.

“Not enthusiastically,” Dave answers.

“I'll kill you if you want,” High Tide offers, propping up his big head on one big fist. The origin of the 375-pound Samoan's nickname is obvious—he gets into the ocean, the water level rises; he gets out, it falls. Simple displacement physics. “Something to do, anyway.”

Johnny Banzai is all over it. “How? How should we kill Dave?”

As a homicide detective for the San Diego Police Department, killing Dave is right in Johnny's wheelhouse. It's refreshing to put his mind to a murder that *isn't* going to happen, as opposed to the three all-too-real killings he has on his

desk right now, including one he doesn't even want to think about. It's been a hot, tetchy summer in San Diego—tempers have flared and lives have been extinguished. A vicious drug war for control of the Baja Cartel has spilled across the border into San Diego, and bodies are turning up all over the place.

"Drowning him would be easiest," Boone suggests.

"Hello?" Tide says. "He's a *lifeguard*?"

Dave the Love God is a lifeguard, only slightly more famous for the lives he's saved than for the women he's slept with on his one-man crusade to boost San Diego's tourist industry. Right now, though, he's belly down on his board, moaning.

"Are you kidding?" Boone asks. "Look at him."

"Drowning is too blatantly ironic," Johnny says. "I mean, the headline legendary lifeguard drowns in flat sea? It doesn't work for me."

"Do you have your gun?" Tide asks.

"In the *water*?"

"If you were my friend," Dave says with a groan, "you'd paddle in, get your pistol from your car, and shoot me."

"Do you know the paperwork involved in discharging your firearm?" Johnny asks.

"What's in a mai tai anyway?" Boone wonders out loud. He was also at Mai Tai Tuesday, his office being next door to The Sundowner and he being sort of an unofficial bouncer for the joint. But he left after having only a couple and went back to his office, upstairs from the Pacific Surf Shop, to see if there were any e-mails from Sunny or any offers for work. Zippo on both, Sunny being really busy and the private investigation field being really not.

Boone's not so bummed about the work, but he does miss Sunny. Even though they have long been "exes," they're still good friends, and he misses her presence.

They all shut up for a second as they feel a wave building up behind them. They wait, feel the slight surge, but then the wave gives up like a guy who's late for work, just can't get out of bed, and decides to call in sick.

Later.

"Could we get back to killing Dave?" Tide asks.

"Yes, please," Dave says.

Boone drops out of the conversation.

Literally.

Tired of making talk, he rolls off his board into the water and lets himself sink. It feels good, but then again, Boone is probably more comfortable in the water than on land. A prenatal surfer in his mother's womb, the ocean is his church, and he's a daily communicant. Working just enough to (barely) support his surfing jones, his office is a block from the beach. His home is even closer—he lives in a cottage on a pier over the water, so the smell, sound, and rhythm of the ocean are constants in his life.

Now he holds his breath and looks up through the water at the relentlessly blue summer sky and pale yellow sun, distorted by refraction. He feels the ocean gently pulse around him, listens to the muted sound of the water running over the

bottom, a scant ten feet or so below, and contemplates the state of his existence.

No serious career, no serious money (okay, no money at all), no serious relationship.

He and Sunny had split up even before she got her big break and went off on the pro tour, and although there is that thing with Petra, who knows where that's going? If anywhere. They've been "seeing" each other casually since last spring but haven't closed the deal and he's not sure he even wants to because he has a feeling that Petra Hall would not be into the friends-with-privileges thing, and that if they did sleep together, he *would* instantly have a serious relationship.

Which he's not sure he wants.

A relationship with Petra "Pete" Hall is heavy-duty reef break, nothing to be trifled with. Pete is gorgeous, smart, funny, and has the heart of a lion, but she's also a career-driven lawyer who loves to argue, ferociously ambitious, and she doesn't surf.

And maybe it's too much, on the end of what's been a heavy year.

There was the whole Tammy Roddick case that brought Petra into Boone's life, and blew up into a massive child prostitution ring that almost *cost* Boone his life; there was Dave blowing the whistle on local gangster Red Eddie's smuggling op; the big swell that rolled in and changed all their lives; and Sunny riding her big wave, making the cover of all the surf mags, and leaving.

Now Sunny was off riding her comet, and Dave was in limbo waiting to see if he'd ever have to testify in Eddie's constantly delayed trial, and Boone was treading water on the edge of a relationship with Pete.

"Is he coming up?" Hang asks the others, starting to get concerned. Boone's been down there a long time.

"I don't care," Dave mumbles. I'm the one who's supposed to die, he thinks, not Boone. Boone's not hung over, Boone didn't down double-digit mai tais—whatever the hell they're made from—last night. Boone doesn't deserve the dignified relief of death. But Dave's lifeguard instincts take over and he looks over the edge of his board to see Boone's face underwater. "He's fine."

"Yeah," Hang says, "but how long can he hold his breath?"

"A long time," Johnny says.

They've actually had breath-holding contests, which Boone invariably won. Johnny has a dark suspicion that Boone is actually some kind of mutant, like his parents were really space aliens from an amphibian planet. Holding your breath is important to a serious surfer, because you might get held under a big wave and then you'd better be able to go without air for a couple of minutes because you're not going to have a choice. So surfers train for that eventuality, which, in reality, is an inevitability. It's going to happen.

Johnny looks down into the water and waves.

Boone waves back.

"He's good," Johnny says.

Which leads to a not very animated discussion of whether it's possible for a person to intentionally drown himself, or whether the body would just take over and force you to breathe. On a cooler day, with more active surf, this is the sort of topic that would have engendered ferocious debate, but with the sun stinking hot