

Making waves

Crime thriller rooted in reality

By Jim Napier

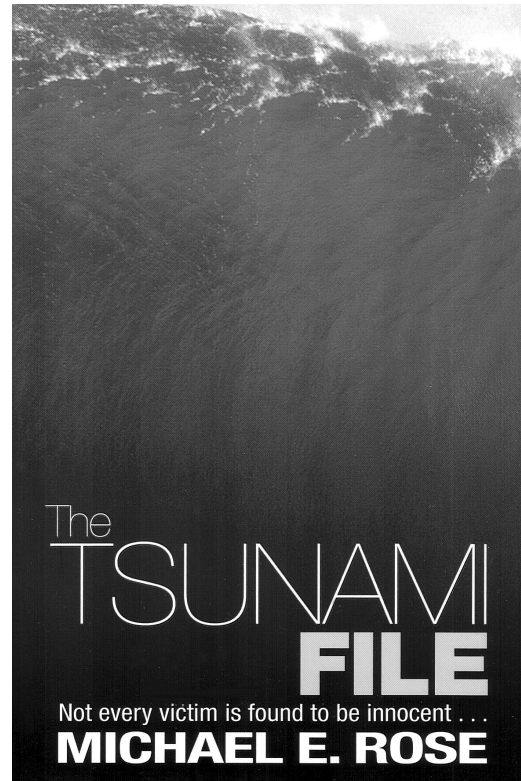
The Sherbrooke *Record*, Friday, August 1st, 2008

Much of crime fiction is born out of conflict and suffering, stories that hinge on deceit, betrayal, loss, and violence. More often than not the violence is man-made: murder tracing its origins to one of the basic motives that inform so much of human action: love and hate, envy and avarice. Occasionally, though, the violence stems from an amoral act of an uncaring nature, cosmic forces over which mere mortals have no control. Such acts challenge our effort to find purpose in such events and give meaning to our lives.

This week's pick is just such a story. It begins in Thailand with the 2004 tsunami and an unidentified body, one of tens of thousands littering the beaches of that sad land. Before it ends the reader will be taken on a complex, compelling journey that moves beyond Thailand to France, Germany, and Canada. The tale traces the disruption caused by conflicting forces, some natural, some not; and it examines how ordinary people attempt to cope with loss on many levels, both physical and emotional, and restore order to their lives.

Michael E. Rose

Born in Montreal, Michael Rose earned a Bachelor's degree in English literature and psychology from Concordia University. He studied journalism at Carleton University in Ottawa before



completing a Masters degree in journalism at the University of Wollongong in Australia. Michael has been a journalist, broadcaster, and foreign correspondent for the CBC, Maclean's, the UPI, Reuters, and Radio France International. From 2003 to 2006 he was Chief of Communications and Publications for Interpol at the agency's headquarters in Lyon, France.

His first novel in the Frank Delany thriller series, *The Mazovia Legacy*, was published in 2003 and shortlisted for the Arthur Ellis Award for Best First Novel the following year. The second novel in

the series, *The Burma Effect*, was published in 2006. In addition to being a novelist he is a playwright and writes children's books and non-fiction.

Michael and his wife Sheryle, also a journalist, presently make their home in Sydney, Australia

The Tsunami File
(McArthur & Co., 2008)

December, 2004: an undersea earthquake occurs off the coast of Indonesia. In the hours that follow, after decimating not merely entire villages, but also entire islands in the region, it sweeps across the Indian Ocean toward the exotic beach resorts of Thailand. In the wake of that upheaval, thousands of bodies wash up on Thailand's shores. In Phuket, a favourite tourist destination, a compound has been transformed into an obscenely huge, makeshift morgue; as relatives wander the nearby beach attempting to locate their love ones, others simply try to derive some order from the senseless violence that has so suddenly overtaken their lives.

Teams of medical examiners and other forensic specialists from all corners of the globe descend on Phuket. Their first task is to determine the cause of death; others labour to establish the identity of victims and bring some sort of closure, however limited, to those left behind.

The Victim Identification Teams include forensic odontologists, entymologists, DNA technicians and fingerprint analysts. Jonah Smith is a British fingerprint technician who had been seconded to Interpol. When an Interpol Response Team is formed to respond to the tsunami disaster, Smith is drafted to help. His own life is in crisis, though on a much more modest scale: his marriage to Fiona has been dissolving for some

time, following the death of their unborn child; and since his arrival in Thailand Smith has entered into a relationship with Concepción Garcia Ramirez, a member of the Spanish forensics team.

As Jonah goes through his daily routine of taking prints from victims and attempting to match them to records, he makes a disturbing discovery: the forensics file containing the records of an unidentified victim with a German tattoo on his forearm seem to have been tampered with. First the pathologists' transcript of the post-mortem has been excised: pages dealing with the victim's limbs and hands have gone missing. Turning to his own impressions of the victim's fingerprints, Smith finds that some have disappeared, and those that remain are too poor to be of use.

A few days later Smith revisits the issue, and attempts to retrieve the file. This time the entire file is missing. Baffled, he asks the head of the German team if they took the file. The man denies all knowledge of the file, and goes on the offensive, threatening Smith if he makes wild accusations impugning the German team's professionalism. When Smith raises his concerns with the chief of the Interpol team, the man dismisses it as unimportant. The compound is chaotic, he notes, with teams from various nations all accessing the same files; and there is no shortage of bodies to go around. He advises Smith to forget the case and move on to other victims.

Not easily put off, Smith discusses the problem with Frank Delany, a Canadian freelance journalist he has come to know. What he doesn't know is that Delany moonlights as an agent for CSIS, the Canadian security agency.

Delany's journalistic interest is piqued; he mines internet databases and learns

that there is a regular Lufthansa flight from Germany to Thailand that caters to so many Germans sexual tourists that it is known as the pedophile express. Building on the tattoo, Delany thinks he might have identified the man in question. But not everything is as it seems, and when he calls a fellow journalist in Germany and asks him to follow up, Delany triggers a series of events that will cascade out of control and put his life, and those of many others, in peril. It's a lesson Delany should already know: there are consequences to making waves.

My Recommendation

A layered, evocative action thriller, *The Tsunami File* is an accomplished work, reminiscent of the novels of John Le Carré and Frederick Forsyth. The plot is full of twists and turns, the characters original and believable, and the reader is carried along effortlessly through the complex, intertwined worlds of intelligence agencies, forensics work, and investigative journalism, the challenging puzzles never overshadowed by the well-paced action. The third and most recent in his Frank Delany thriller series, *The Tsunami File* is a fascinating tale on many levels, and ends all too quickly, leaving the reader wanting more. It is one of the most compelling novels that I've read in a very long time.

Jim Napier can be reached at
jnapier@sherbrookerecord.com