

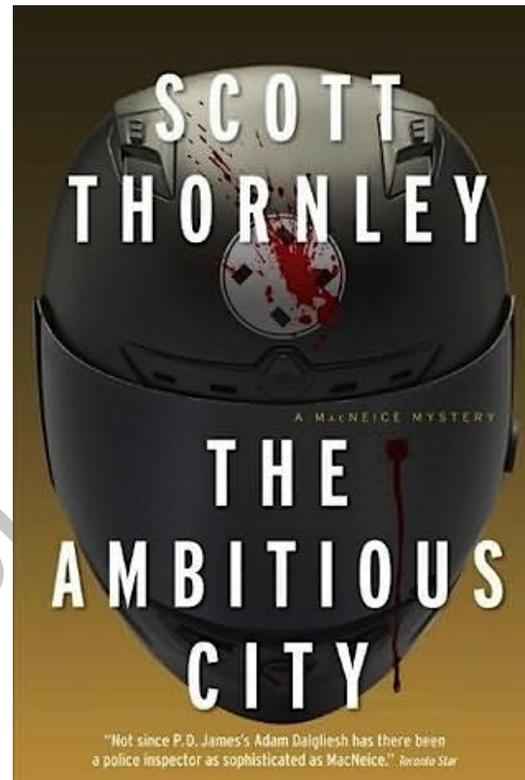
On his way to a hat trick

Toronto's Scott Thornley serves up a winner

by Jim Napier

In 2011, at a point in his life when traditionally most people would be looking toward retirement, Scott Thornley turned his multifaceted talents as award-winning media executive, artist, and photographer to crime writing, and published his debut crime novel, *Erasing Memory*. And what a corker it was: combining a compelling storyline with an engaging group of characters, believable dialogue, and well-paced action, it was an impressive debut novel that I predicted would leave readers asking for more. Now Thornley's fans get their wish: the sequel, *The Ambitious City*, has just come out, and fully lives up to the promise of his earlier work.

The normally mundane Industrial city of Dundurn (read Hamilton), Ontario is having an eventful week. Construction workers dredging the harbour for a high-visibility waterfront museum project have uncovered the remains of not one, but two separate sets of bodies. The first pair has been found in the trunk of a submerged car, and dates from seventy years earlier; it has, of course, to be looked into, but the odds are



that the perpetrators are long dead. More troubling is their second discovery: two more bodies encased in concrete columns can only have been placed there recently. Both finds come hard on the heels of the unearthing of a major gravesite on biker property which contains the remains of seven shrink-wrapped corpses. The harbour project is vital to the economic recovery of the cash-strapped city, and the mayor is anxious to get it back on track

as soon as possible. A busy time, then, for Detective Superintendent MacNeice and his team.

But as if he didn't already have enough on his plate, MacNeice is soon confronted by another crisis: a psychopath is viciously mutilating and murdering young women of colour, taunting the police by posting cellphone photos of his victims on the Internet. MacNeice is forced to divide his team between the two cases, and, in an effort to track down the killer, brings Detective Fiza Aziz – herself a visible minority figure – back from her duties lecturing on criminology in Ottawa to help with the case. It is a fateful decision that will put both their lives on the line.

As MacNeice struggles with these challenging cases he will have to sever a Gordian knot of intrigue involving organized

crime, biker gangs and ex-servicemen who have returned from the horrors of Afghanistan, as well as deal with his own recurring nightmares concerning the loss of his wife, Kate, four years earlier.

With a topical, layered storyline told from multiple points of view, firmly anchored in nuanced characters and assured writing, there is much to like about Thornley's latest work. It's always a bonus for a reviewer to be able to confirm that a major new crime-writing talent has emerged, and Scott Thornley is just that. *The Ambitious City* will utterly put to rest the old publisher's canard that crime fiction set in Canadian cities will not sell (and hadn't Maureen Jennings and William Deverell already done that some time ago?)

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, and *Type M for Murder*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com