

All Cry Chaos

Leonard Rosen

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At the age of fifty-seven, Interpol detective Henri Poincare still has the capacity to be shocked and saddened by human brutality. And in this first of a projected series of mysteries Poincare has plenty to be shocked about. He is still haunted at having seen the aftermath of an ethnic slaughter in Bosnia that took the lives of dozens of Muslim men and boys, even though he has tracked down and captured Stipo Banovic, the mild-mannered former librarian who supervised the killings.

Now Poincare is confronted by another atrocity: Someone has blown up a hotel room in Amsterdam, apparently atomizing a brilliant young math professor from Harvard who was in the city to address an impending meeting of the World Trade Organization. In the course of investigating the explosion, which has all the earmarks of a professional assassination, Poincare turns up a veritable gallery of suspects, ranging from an indigenous-rights firebrand from Peru to a billionaire mutual funds manager in Boston. Poincare's quest hop-scotches him through Europe, the US, Canada, and back. Meanwhile in France, his extended family is under Interpol protection because Banovic has triggered from his jail cell a plot to kill them all.

There is yet one more element of danger Poincare has to contend with: Millions of fundamentalist Christians around the world are counting down the days until the second coming of Christ, and some of them are blowing themselves up in public places in the hope of hastening the divine return.

Temperamentally, Poincare is principled and by the book. He persistently refuses to tamper with evidence or sidestep the laws he's vowed to uphold, a moral fastidiousness that prompts a fellow detective to sneer, "You know, this is the reason bad guys win—because scrupulous pricks like you play by the rules." However, as one calamity after another rains down on Poincare, he has to ask himself if some people aren't too evil to deserve fair play.

Reduced to a summary, the plot of *All Cry Chaos* sounds a bit far-fetched, but Rosen takes the time to brush and untangle each thread until his grand tapestry of action is revealed. Moreover, he thoroughly invests himself in the characters he's created, making them not just believable but whole. Their speech conveys their immersion in the professions or politics he's assigned to them, whether it's a lecturer in theoretical mathematics discussing fractals or a resistance fighter coming to a boil about the evils of imperialism. Poincare himself alternates fluidly between being a no-nonsense investigator and a doting, heart-on-his-sleeve grandfather. Ultimately, his Job-like moral struggles are just as riveting to witness as his analytical processes, and by the end of the book it's obvious that Poincare has the depth and motivational momentum to sleuth for readers again.

EDWARD MORRIS (June 20, 2012)

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