

End of an era?

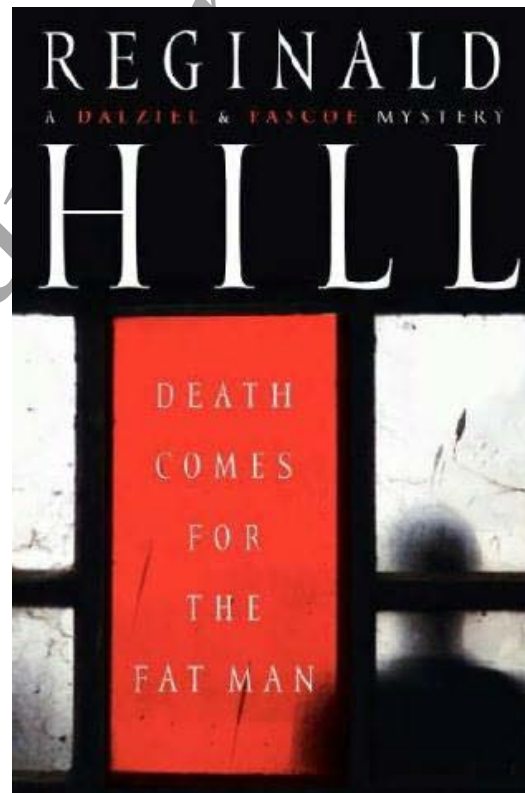
Confronting the unthinkable

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

For over thirty-five years accomplished crime writer Reg Hill has been penning a prize-winning series of novels based on the exploits of Yorkshire detectives Andy Dalziel and Peter Pascoe. The corpulent Superintendent Dalziel, known as Fat Andy (but only behind his back), could serve as a model for the Politically Incorrect: he is rude, loud, and has strong opinions on everything from women police officers (especially his superiors) to ethnic minorities. Yet beneath all this personal detritus Dalziel manages to exude a certain loveliness, perhaps precisely because in a world where superficially polite behaviour is the norm, he unfailingly speaks his mind. Nor is his candour Andy's only vice: when he's not offending someone verbally, Dalziel is often scratching his privates or "passing wind," as the British so delicately put it. Not a particular comfort to his long-suffering sidekick, Detective Inspector Peter Pascoe, who constantly has to run interference between his boss and his superiors, the press, the entire female gender, and anyone who happens to be passing. Together, the two detectives form one of the great pairings in crime fiction, and the widespread popularity of the novels, together with the long-running TV series they have spawned, attest to Hill's considerable skills as a writer.

This latest entry in the Dalziel and Pascoe series lead Hill's readers to the edge of a precipice, and forces them to confront Fat Andy's (and by extension, their own) mortality. The experience is unsettling, and the implications don't bear thinking about. But like taxes, death is not easily denied.



Reginald Hill

One of the stalwarts of the British crime writing scene, Reg Hill has been penning mysteries since 1970, and has amassed over thirty crime novels to date. Along the way he's won a host of awards,

including a Crime Writers Association Golden Dagger for his Dalziel and Pascoe series, and a Cartier Diamond Dagger for his lifetime contribution to the genre. The son of a professional soccer player and factory worker, Hill demonstrated an academic turn of mind, winning a scholarship to Oxford. After graduating he tried his hand at being a schoolmaster, and later lectured in a Teacher's College before turning to writing full-time. Gentle and soft-spoken (most unlike his creation, Andy Dalziel), Reg Hill and his wife live in a Victorian vicarage in Cumbria, England.

Death Comes for the Fat Man
(Doubleday, 2007)

Andy Dalziel and Peter Pascoe are called to an armed standoff in the middle of the city. A patrolling constable has spotted a man with a gun in a nearby shop, and radioed for assistance. The situation is fraught with unknowns: the officer might simply be mistaken in what he saw, or it could be a robbery, or it might be something far worse. Before a negotiator can arrive, Dalziel decides to approach the shop and see for himself. Against Pascoe's advice he sets out, but before he's halfway across the street, a bomb goes off. The shop—and many of the surrounding buildings—are destroyed. Shielded by his boss, Peter Pascoe is seriously injured; but when he staggers to his knees, he realizes that he is lucky: Andy Dalziel took the full force of the blast.

As Dalziel hovers between life and death in Intensive Care, Pascoe nurses his own wounds and strives to make sense of the incident. He learns that the premises have been under surveillance by CAT, Britain's Combined Anti-Terrorism Unit. With his wife Ellie less than pleased, at his insistence Peter is temporarily

assigned to the unit, only to find himself marginalized by his London colleagues. Adding to the drama, there is a mole in CAT, with ominous ties to an outside organization with an agenda of its own.

As Dalziel dances with death in an impersonal hospital ward, his colleagues are left to confront the possibility of a world without the rock that anchors their existence. Will Andy Dalziel succumb to his injuries? Readers, too, come to fear the worst. Is it the end of an era?

Lifted from the headlines

With *Death Comes for the Fat Man* Reg Hill brings his highly-regarded series squarely into the troubled twenty-first century, with a storyline lifted from the headlines. Personalizing the victims of the blast allows Hill to drive home the immediacy of terrorist attacks to which readers may have become inured. *Death* is carefully and cleverly plotted, and holds the reader firmly in its grasp until the very last page, and then leaves us begging for more. Fans of the long-running series will not be disappointed in this latest, and definitely one of Hill's best, crime novels to date.

Jim Napier can be reached at
jim.napier52@gmail.com