



BOOKSELLERS

1323 S. Rangeline Rd
(in the Carmel Walk plaza)
Carmel, IN 46032

317-705-9711
tollfree: 800-643-6737
fax: 317-705-1402

staff@themysterycompany.com
www.themysterycompany.com

Hours

Mondays through Fridays
10:30 am - 5:30 pm
Wednesday evenings to 8 pm
Saturday:
10:30 am - 6 pm



s e n s e™
*Independent Bookstores
for Independent Minds*

Sam Hill returns Saturday to talk about and sign copies of his Top Kiernan novels

We're delighted to welcome Sam Hill back to The Mystery Company on Saturday, January 15, 2005 at 2 pm. Sam will talk about and sign copies of his two novels, *Buzz Monkey* (Carroll & Graf, \$24.00) and its sequel, *Buzz Rift* (Carroll & Graf, \$25.00).

Here's Moni's review of the first novel, which we originally published a year ago:

A great book. *Buzz Monkey* works on several levels — as a mystery, as a character study, and as a reflection of today's world where the line between bad and good is more of a smudge.

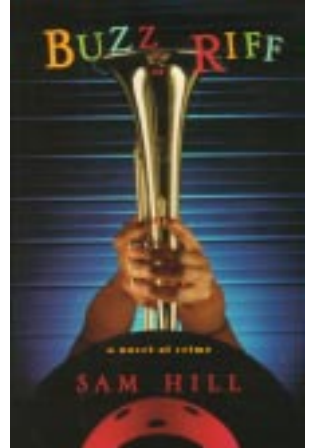
The mystery is fairly simple: Did Top Kiernan's childhood friend, Dee Lane, disappear with a drug lord's money? But from there it gets complicated, because the drug lord thinks Top is holding the money for Dee and puts the word out to a sleazy underworld of opportunists that he wants his money back and doesn't care how it gets done. Worried about his friend, Top begins the journey to find out what really happened and along the way people close to him are threatened, and some even die, before the truth is finally learned.

Hill is subtle with his clues. I didn't figure it out until Top revealed the solution, but I also didn't feel like the author sprang anything on me. The hints are all there, but are seamlessly woven into the fast-paced story.

What makes this a great book are the characters, especially that of Top Kiernan.

Top is the typical anti-hero. As a young man, he transported drugs with his friend Dee, for the thrill of it. Now, supposedly, he is a legitimate Athens, Georgia businessman, running

continued inside ➔



Calendar

Saturday, January 15, 2 pm

Sam Hill visits to talk about and sign copies of his books.

Wednesday, January 26, 7 pm. Discussion: *Bloodhounds* by Peter Lovesey

Thursday, January 27, noon. Discussion: *Bloodhounds* by Peter Lovesey

Sunday, February 20, 2 pm

Stephanie Kane, author of four novels featuring attorney Jackie Flowers including the just published *Seeds of Doubt*, presents a workshop on "The Structure of Suspense."

Wed., February 23, 7 pm. Discussion: *Death at La Fenice* by Donna Leon

Thursday, February 24, noon. Discussion: *Death at La Fenice* by Donna Leon

Saturday, March 5, 2 pm

Indiana writer **Tony Perona**, author of two novels featuring investigative reporter turned stay-at-home dad Nick Bertetto, visits to talk about and sign copies of his books.

Wednesday, April 6, 7 pm

"A Mystery Mt. Rushmore: Which Faces Belong?" Four mystery writers, **Luisia Buehler**, **Alex Matthews**, **S.D. Tooley** and **Mary Welk**, lead a discussion culminating in a vote.

Wednesday, April 20, 7 pm

Susan Wittig Albert visits to talk about and sign copies of her books, including her new China Bayles novel, *Dead Man's Bones*.

a reference/fact-checking service out of his home, a converted schoolhouse. (His bed is in the middle of the basketball court in the gym.) Early in the novel, he admits to setting up the business to give the IRS a reason for the money he earns — earned as a contract mercenary for a company named Shaw’s. His specialty is finding and rescuing kidnap victims, but his last case had gone horribly wrong with the death of two kidnap victims. His contact at Shaw’s suggests that Top has gone from a “buzz monkey,” a person who controls the adrenaline edge to his advantage, to a “buzz junkie,” where the adrenaline takes over and controls him, causing him to lose his edge. Even his current legitimate business life is marred by his sleeping with his married office manager.

But Hill balances the not-so-admirable qualities of his protagonist with some good ones. For one thing, Top is one hundred percent loyal to his friends. Besides taking the heat while trying to find out what happened to Dee Lane, Top works in tandem with another boyhood friend, Bob John, a DEA agent, who is also a friend of Dee’s. The relationship of the three friends — a mercenary-cum-researcher, a DEA agent and a drug runner — colors the story and demonstrates the moral that no one is one hundred percent good or evil.

Now, don’t get me wrong, Hill has some real bad asses in this book and their downfalls are not pretty. When it is necessary, Top can kill. But it’s like that line in the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, *True Lies*, where Arnold’s character admits to Jamie Lee Curtis that he only killed the bad guys. Top only kills the bad guys while striving to protect the innocent. Yes, he’s a bad boy, but he’s on our side.

The ending is satisfying, because the loose ends are all tied up. Yet, the bow is sloppy, because once again Hill demonstrates a truism — not all bad deeds are punished. But as long as the truly heinous are put away, life with all its uncertainty can move forward.

And here’s Moni’s review of book #2:

Everything I said about the writing in *Buzz Monkey* holds true for *Buzz Riff*. Hill’s writing just flows, pulling readers seamlessly into the story and holding them there with velvet claws. Top Kiernan is one of the better-written characters in mystery today.

This time out, Top is having business problems. His office manager/ex-girlfriend has left, taking most of Top’s research/fact-finding clients with her. His freelance work with Shaw’s has dried up because of his addiction to the buzz. Without those two sources of income, he hasn’t been able to pay the mortgage on the schoolhouse where he lives and houses the business. Foreclosure is imminent — there is also a twist on this situation, one so perfect that it once again highlights the subtle perfection of Hill’s writing.

Desperate to save his home, Top takes the job of locating a stolen Confederate flag, even though he despises everything the man hiring him stands for. After all, \$20,000 is \$20,000. Along for the ride are Dee Lane, Benny and Bob John — and a new love interest. The ride proves to be bumpy with twists and turns that keep the reader guessing. The ending is perfection itself — and shall I say it? — heart-warming. Kudos to Sam Hill for keeping Top fresh and interesting.

Can’t make it in to the store? We offer free standard shipping on all orders delivered to US addresses. Call, email or visit our website to shop at home!

New & noteworthy

Winter of Discontent by Jeanne M. Dams

Forge, \$24.95 — **SIGNED COPIES AVAILABLE**

It is Christmas in England. Dorothy Martin goes on a shopping trip with her neighbor and best friend, Jane Langland. They make a side trip to the town hall to see Jane’s friend Bill. He is at a small local museum, where most recently he has been working on a collection of materials for a World War II display. Although his car is in its usual place, Bill is not to be found and the museum is unattended. Dorothy makes a call to the police and talks to Derek Morrison, who took Dorothy’s husband’s place when he retired from the police. Derek admits there is not much the police can do until there are signs of foul play or more time passes.



That evening, the weather worsens. If Bill was out, he probably did not survive. Jane is afraid that the police won’t take the case seriously because Bill is old. Jane and Dorothy take it upon themselves to retrace his steps. They search the museum from basement to attic. Ultimately, Bill is found in the basement, dead in a hidden area. Jane will not accept his death as natural, particularly after his assistant is koshed the next day. She and Dorothy begin an investigation into what Bill was doing and who he might have been dealing with.

The investigation leads to World War II and a nearby airfield. There are more deaths and many dead ends before Jane and Dorothy find answers. Jeanne Dams’ prose is particularly striking when she is expressing Jane’s fears about growing old and the treatment of the elderly.

— Edna

Friends & Neighbors

Company Members can get an early look at forthcoming books through our Friends & Neighbors program. We offer a selection of advance reading copies of new mysteries. You may borrow one ARC at a time without charge. All we ask is that you return the ARC with your comments about the book and that you allow us to use your comments in the store, on the web and in our newsletter.

This review is by Lynn R.:

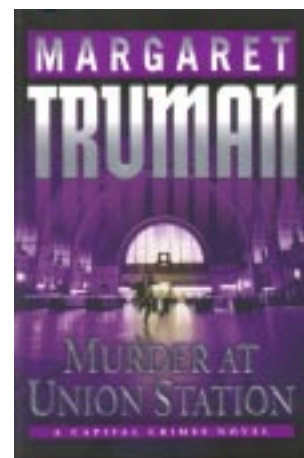
Murder at Union Station

by Margaret Truman

Ballantine, \$24.95

In her new book, *Murder at Union Station*, Margaret Truman again combines her knowledge of D.C. goings-on with a good story. The very topical theme of this novel is the corrupt politics in the nation’s capital, especially in an election year.

The central character, Richard Marienthal, is a would-be first book writer, who selects a “retired” mob



2004 bestselling titles and writers

The bestselling authors list, below, excludes writers with just one book and also excludes writers where all of our sales were at off-site events. Not familiar with any of these books and authors? We'd be happy to tell you more about them. Stop in, call or email! Extended versions of these lists — our top 40 titles and writers — are on our website.

TOP 20 TITLES OF 2004

1. **Executioner's Mask** by Dick Cady (Evans, \$19.95)
2. **Texas Rangers** edited by Gorman & Greenberg (Berkley, \$5.99)
3. **Death of Desert Belle** by Phil Dunlap (Avalon, \$21.95)
4. **Teasing Secrets from the Dead** by Emily Craig (Crown, \$24.95)
5. **Thirteenth Night** by Alan Gordon (Crum Creek, \$14.00)
6. **Sunday Philosophy Club** by Alexander McCall Smith (Pantheon, \$19.95)
7. **Uncommon Grounds** by Sandra Balzo (Five Star, \$25.95)
8. **Tonight I Said Goodbye** by Michael Koryta (St. Martin's, \$21.95)
9. **Concrete Blonde** by Michael Connelly (St. Martin's, \$7.99)
10. **Burglar on the Prowl** by Lawrence Block (Morrow, \$24.95)
- tie **Baltimore Blues** by Laura Lippman (Avon, \$6.99)
12. **Dilly of a Death** by Susan Wittig Albert (Berkley, \$23.95)
13. **Guardian of the Horizon** by Elizabeth Peters (Morrow, \$24.95)
14. **Maine Mulch Murder** by A. Carman Clark (Worldwide, \$5.99)
- tie **No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency** by Alexander McCall Smith (Anchor, \$11.95)
16. **Fire in the Flint** by Candace Robb (UK import, \$21.00)
17. **Jester Leaps In** by Alan Gordon (St. Martin's, \$6.50)
18. **Iron Lake** by William Kent Krueger (Pocket, \$7.99)
19. **Death at La Fenice** by Donna Leon (Harper, \$6.99)
- tie **Death by Deep Dish Pie** by Sharon Short (Avon, \$6.50)

TOP 20 WRITERS OF 2004

1. Alexander McCall Smith
2. Alan Gordon
3. Donna Leon
4. Laura Lippman
5. Susan Wittig Albert
6. Rhys Bowen
7. Jeanne M. Dams
8. Barbara D'Amato
9. Margaret Frazer
- tie Peter Lovesey
11. Michael Connelly
12. Elizabeth Peters
13. Candace Robb
14. Lawrence Block
15. Lyn Hamilton
16. Sharan Newman
- tie Peter Tremayne
18. William Kent Krueger
19. Sara Hoskinson Frommer
20. Roberta Gellis

member as his subject. Originally his plan is to interview this man, who has emigrated to Israel. In the subsequent novel Richard plans to write, there would be no problem with any revengeful mobsters because supposedly none of it is really true.

Unfortunately, in the land of the federal government, there is a cantankerous senator out to defeat the re-election of the current president. The senator and his team use Marienthal's interviews with the former hit man to begin an investigation of former activities of the president, in an unfavorable interpretation.

The mobster returns to the U.S, is killed in the train station, and events hurtle to the finish.

What I read last year...

Through 2004, I've had a chance to tell you about some of the books that I encountered and enjoyed, and the bestseller lists above reflect a lot of what I (and others here at the store) liked to recommend. Before we get too far into the new year, I wanted to take a moment to look back, to mention some of the books that I didn't have a chance to talk about enough during the year.

Charles Benoit's *Relative Danger* (Poisoned Pen, \$24.95) is probably too light in tone to be a candidate for the Edgar Award for best first novel, but it would be a fine choice. The easy way to describe it is as an updated and male version of Dorothy Gilman's Mrs. Pollifax novels, a delightful tale of a small town guy who suddenly finds himself unemployed and on the adventure of a lifetime in Casablanca, Cairo and Singapore, chasing a legendary diamond that his uncle was smuggling in 1948. It's great fun.

Colin Cotterill's *The Coroner's Lunch* (Soho, \$24) is a very different sort of first novel (technically, not a first novel — and not eligible for the best first Edgar — but his first to be published in

the US). This novel is set in Laos in 1975, soon after the Communist takeover. It's a strange place, but then *everything* is strange in a book that truly puts in another world. Coroner Siri Paiboun gets involved in several cases, some loosely connected and some separate, each of which is fascinating. Cotterill writes with a nice sense of humor — perhaps because humor is the only way to cope with such a weird situation. Detective novel purists might be dismayed by the mystical and dream elements, but I think they add a lot to our understanding of this culture.

Another writer who's exploring a foreign culture is Philip DePoy; the difference is that his foreign culture is right here in the US — Georgia's Appalachian country. His two novels featuring Fever Devilin, *The Devil's Hearth* (out of print already, but we still have a few copies at \$5.99) and *The Witch's Grave* (St. Martin's, \$23.95) are terrific, and it's hard to think of a better way to explore this place than through the eyes of Devilin, a professor of folklore who comes home. Devilin has the mind of an outsider but the heart of a native, and his exploration of his roots is both intellectual and emotional. These stories are beautifully constructed and written, and all of the characters, from Devilin and his two sidekicks (a fellow academic and a boyhood friend turned police officer, representing Devilin's two worlds) on down are vividly drawn.

Curt Colbert's Jake Rossiter novels are just plain fun. *Rat City* (Uglytown, \$15.00) and *Sayonaraville* (Uglytown, \$14.95) are both set in Seattle — one of the least ugly towns out there — immediately after World War II. Rossiter, a private eye, and the city he knows and loves are both adjusting to postwar life and to a new, more diverse world. Both novels involve minority communities, and both stories force Rossiter to consider stereotypes, as does his assistant, Miss Jenkins. Colbert is clearly enjoying himself in these self-



317-705-9711
 toll-free: 800-643-6737
 www.themysterycompany.com

THE MYSTERY COMPANY
 1323 S. Rangeline Rd
 Carmel, IN 46032

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

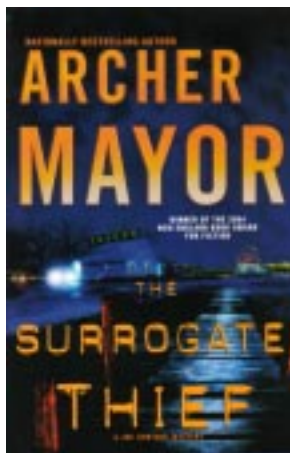
conscious throwback novels, and his enthusiasm is infectious. Colbert's third novel, *Queer Street* (Uglytown, \$24.95) is just in.

Finally, I wanted to mention three longtime favorites whom I came back to this year, with renewed appreciation for their excellence. It's easy to dismiss Nancy Atherton's Aunt Dimity books as lightweight fluff — in fact they work well as warmhearted fluff — but there's more to them than meets the eye. Early this year, I read her latest, *Aunt Dimity Snowbound* (due in paperback shortly), and loved its clever reverse plot. More recently, we did her first, *Aunt Dimity's Death* (Penguin, \$6.99) with our daytime discussion group. We all enjoyed rereading it, and found new nuances to it.

Joe Gunther, the policemen who stars in Archer Mayor's long-running series, is such a Boy Scout; it's refreshing to find a protagonist who's not a drunk showboat and who works within the system. *The Surrogate Thief* (Mysterious Press, \$24.95) offers Joe a case that reminds him of his earliest days on the force, a time when his wife was dying of cancer. Some of the setup is a little clunky, but Mayor's compelling on the details and he delivers a satisfying resolution. This is the best police procedural series going today.

I'm out of space to talk about Jane Langton here. I'll find a chance to tell you all more about her in 2005. Happy New Year!

— Jim



SPECIAL EVENTS

15% of sales on January 15 to go to tsunami relief

In the face of the utter devastation that we see in images coming back from areas affected by the tsunami, it's hard to know what to do to help. We've decided to give 15% of our gross sales — in store, over the web, and by phone, fax and email — on January 15 to tsunami relief. The owners and staff of The Mystery Company will match that amount dollar for dollar. At this time of year, we're not real busy and it won't be much. But it's something that we can do. It's something we must do.

"The Structure of Suspense"

Stephanie Kane, author of four novels about Colorado attorney Jackie Flowers, most recently *Seeds of Doubt*, will present a workshop on Sunday, February 20 on "The Structure of Suspense." She writes that the workshop "covers story elements, structural and stylistic techniques, the relationship between tension and suspense, and how suspense works hand in hand with other elements of dramatic story-telling at both the scene level and in the context of the larger plot. To illustrate, I deconstruct an old Twilight Zone episode."