

Buried Secrets, Buried Lies

Latest Rankin yet another delight

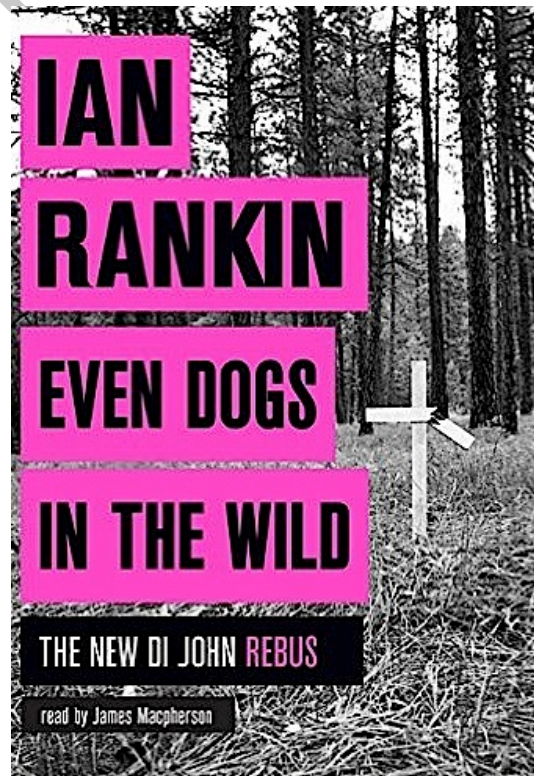
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

David Menzies Minton, better known as Lord Minton, was a senior official in Scotland's justice system. No longer. He's been found dead in his home, strangled and beaten. His valuables are untouched, but a note found in his wallet says I'M GOING TO KILL YOU FOR WHAT YOU DID. While DIs Siobhan Clarke and Malcolm Fox are investigating the crime scene a shot is reported at a house not that far away belonging to Big Ger Cafferty, an aging and allegedly retired gangster who for decades had controlled much of the criminal activity in Edinburgh. Not surprisingly, when they arrive at his house Cafferty refuses to speak with them. Siobhan calls John Rebus; he may have retired from the force, but she knows he's the one man in Edinburgh who might get Cafferty to open up.

Her confidence is not misplaced. When Rebus arrives he manages to get inside Cafferty's home. But the big man denies there was a shot, insisting that he simply fell against the window. For the time being the

police have no choice but to accept his story, and they withdraw, their tails between their legs. But after the police have gone Cafferty sits down at a table and sips his whisky, examining a nine-millimetre bullet pulled from his pocket. Then he looks at a note taken from a drawer: it has the same message, word for word, as Lord Minton's note.



As Lord Advocate, Minton had been in charge of Scotland's prosecution service. Assuming the note is the key to his death, Siobhan and her team pour over his public and private life, but come up blank. If it was a grudge, was it tied to his work or his personal life? And as a senior member of Scotland's legal system, why didn't Minton simply go to the police? Most intriguingly, what ties the esteemed public figure to Big Ger Cafferty, the man who used to run Edinburgh's underworld?

Siobhan wonders if Minton's death is somehow related to that of Michael Tolland. The winner of a large prize in the lottery, Tolland had been found at his home in Linlithgow a few weeks previously, beaten to death. The assumption at the time was that the crime had been related to his lottery winnings, a breaking-and-entering gone wrong. But nothing had been missing: credit cards cash, laptop, an expensive watch, were all found in the home, as they had at Lord Minton's. Curiouser and curiouser.

Rebus and Fox look up a current local gangster, Darryl Christie, who reveals that fellow thugs Joe and Dennis Stark, father and son, had come to Edinburgh recently. He suggests they might have had a territorial squabble with Cafferty. That's a problem for the enquiry,

because another CID team is looking into the Starks, and they're not happy about Siobhan and Clarke potentially compromising their surveillance. They accept Malcolm Fox as liaison with their team, but who is watching whom?

Rankin's latest novel is vintage Rebus, rooted in dark events long forgotten, and featuring nuanced characters and layered plots, atmospheric settings and menacing dialogue. And like his earlier works, there are also flashes of Rankin's wry humour. When Siobhan phones him at home, Rebus complains

'You're interrupting my training.'

'What training?'

"I'm planning on doing the Edinburgh Marathon.'

'Twenty-six pubs, is that? Sorry to break into your schedule.'

'I'm going to have to stop you there, caller. There's someone on line two with a less smart mouth.'

Rankin has an impressive ability to make all of his stories fresh and exciting. Still at the top of his form after twenty-eight years and over thirty novels, Rankin continues to set the benchmark for crime writers. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, when one is tired of Rankin one is tired of life.

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