

Rankin Rules

Latest Rebus plumbs the depths

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

John Rebus is retired, but he just can't let go: he fills his days looking at unsolved cases from decades earlier. One in particular has caught his attention: in 1978 Maria Turquand had been strangled in a room at the Caledonian Hotel. She had had a string of lovers, and performing at the Caley that night had been a well-known band. Some of its members came under suspicion. The crime had received a lot of media play at the time, a journalist even writing a book about it. But nothing had come of it, and the case withered in the archives of Police Scotland as Unsolved. It niggles away at Rebus, who hates loose ends.

But Rebus is finding it difficult to make any headway – at least until a deal comes his way. Local gangster Darryl Christie has been given a good thumping one night in his own driveway, and DI Siobhan Clarke has been handed the case. Christie's natural enemy is Big Ger Cafferty, who controlled crime in Edinburgh until Christie appeared on the scene. He's an obvious suspect, but Clarke knows

that he won't open up to anyone but Rebus. She seeks his help, but Rebus has a price: he wants access to all the files concerning the murder of Maria Turquand.



In the cloistered city of Edinburgh everything and everyone is connected, and Rebus must navigate a labyrinth of friendships — and enmities — reaching back decades. All the while he must wrestle with a previously unknown foe that may very well kill him.

I've said it before: Ian Rankin represents the high-water mark of contemporary crime writing, British or otherwise. In over thirty novels, plays, and short story collections he has treated readers to refreshingly original tales marked by dark atmosphere, taut plotting and crackling dialogue. He excels at depicting the cat-and-dog posturing of adversaries, the tension extending to include even his friends. Consider this exchange between Rebus and Malcolm Fox, a colleague who once investigated him for unprofessional conduct:

They sat in silence for a few moments, concentrating on their drinks. There was another tap at the window, a further invitation for Rebus to step outside. He shook his head and mouthed the word 'No.'

'Am I really seeing this?' Fox said. 'You've packed in the cigs?'

'Call it a trial separation,' Rebus replied.

'Bloody hell. I need to sell my tobacco shares.'

'I think it's great,' Clarke said.

'Though it wipes out about the only hobby he had,' Fox countered.

Whether he's confronting crime kingpins or baiting his colleagues at Police Scotland, Rebus is his own man, and can't seem to resist a quick jibe that sets off everyone around him. It's a trademark of Rankin's novels, one of many high points in his writing, and the crackling dialogue in *Rather Be the Devil* proves that he's still the very best at it.

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Since 2005 more than 500 of Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, the *Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning crime fiction site, *Deadly Diversions*. His own crime novel, *Legacy*, is scheduled to appear in the Spring of 2017. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com