

# Not so gently into the night

## *Rankin retires Rebus*

---

### *Suspended Sentences*

---

by Jim Napier

It's been twenty years since mystery fans were first introduced to Ian Rankin's Detective Inspector John Rebus, the Edinburgh-based sleuth who is the bane of criminals, colleagues, and superiors alike. Ian's taciturn hero (more accurately, anti-hero) is enigmatic, even to his closest friends. Rebus — his very name means puzzle, and is a reflection of Rankin's penchant for wordplay — is divorced, with a thirty-something daughter and not much else in the way of an ongoing close relationship. His partner, Detective Sergeant Siobhan Clarke, regularly has to patch him up, dry him out, or run interference when he has a confrontation with his superiors, which is most of the time. Their relationship constantly threatens to develop into something more serious, but somehow never quite makes it. The reasons (and the relationship) are more fully explored in this, the final novel of the Rebus series.

So why kill the golden goose? A simple matter of fidelity to truth, something that has always marked Ian's writing. In the series Rebus is nearing sixty, the age at which police officers in Scotland are required to retire. Rebus will move on, his work taken up by Siobhan Clarke, who has assumed increasing importance in recent novels.

At last count Ian Rankin had penned seventeen Rebus novels, plus another three in his Jack Harvey series, two

collections of short stories, and a photographic guide titled *Rebus's Scotland*.



The awards and accolades have come flooding in: seven novels on the Scottish best-seller list *at the same time* (an event unique in publishing history), no less than four Dagger Awards, countless honours in other countries, four honorary degrees and an OBE for his services to literature. There are Rebus audiobooks and DVDs, and RebusTours around the Emerald City. Rankin is the first ever recipient of the Edinburgh Award, created to honour the city's own;

and in April of 2007 he was named Deputy Lieutenant of Edinburgh by the Lord Provost: his onerous duties include standing in for the Lord Provost in the event she is unable to greet any member of the Royal Family when they visit Edinburgh. As they say, life is tough.

To mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rebus, the Caledonian Brewery is issuing a special Rebus Beer; there is also a commemorative twenty-year old Rebus Whisky from the distillery at Highland Park. In March Ian held a charity auction, including amongst the incentives a walk-on role in an upcoming episode of the Rebus TV series. Finally, the city of Toronto designated October 17<sup>th</sup> as Ian Rankin Day, during which Ian was interviewed on stage by Margaret Atwood. Thus, in the incredibly short space of two decades Ian Rankin has moved from Young Turk to *Eminence Grise*.

Oh, one more thing: when he's not spinning his stories, bringing pleasure to millions around the world, Ian Rankin and his wife Miranda devote their time to their two sons, one of whom is severely disabled. Some people *deserve* a little good fortune in their lives.

***Exit Music***  
**(Orion Books, 2007)**

DI John Rebus is a week away from retirement when he is handed what seems to be a straightforward case to ease out his final days: a Russian poet has been murdered, apparently the victim of a mugging. But Rebus never takes things at face value. There happens to be a visiting delegation of Russian capitalists in town, buying up art and seeking new development opportunities in Scotland. When he learns that one of them knew the victim, and had a drink in the same hotel bar shortly

before the man's death, Rebus begins to look into things more closely. Lurking in the background Rebus finds his old nemesis, Edinburgh crime lord "Big Ger" Cafferty. Rebus would dearly love to put him away before he retires, only he's been warned off by people higher up. Just three days short of his retirement he is suspended (for calling the Chief Constable a name I can't repeat here); but John Rebus is not a man to give up easily, and he searches for another way to bring the case home.

***Fresh and authentic writing***

There are a lot of very talented writers out there. What sets Ian Rankin apart from almost all the others (and not just crime writers) is his uncanny way with words. He is quite simply one of the most talented writers alive. Every page of a Rankin novel is fresh and authentic writing that jumps out at readers and defies them to put his books down. It is compelling stuff, and reading a Rankin novel—even re-reading one for the second or third time—is like sipping a fine wine or whisky, or sharing an evening with a treasured friend one hasn't seen for a long while.

So enjoy the final Rebus (which is not to say that he mightn't make a cameo in the further adventures of Siobhan Clarke). And as you do, perhaps you'll join me in opening a bottle of single malt—and like the passing of an old friend not lament, but celebrate, his time among us.

Jim Napier can be reached at  
[jim.napier52@gmail.com](mailto:jim.napier52@gmail.com)