

(Excerpt from a review on DorothyL, c. 1999)

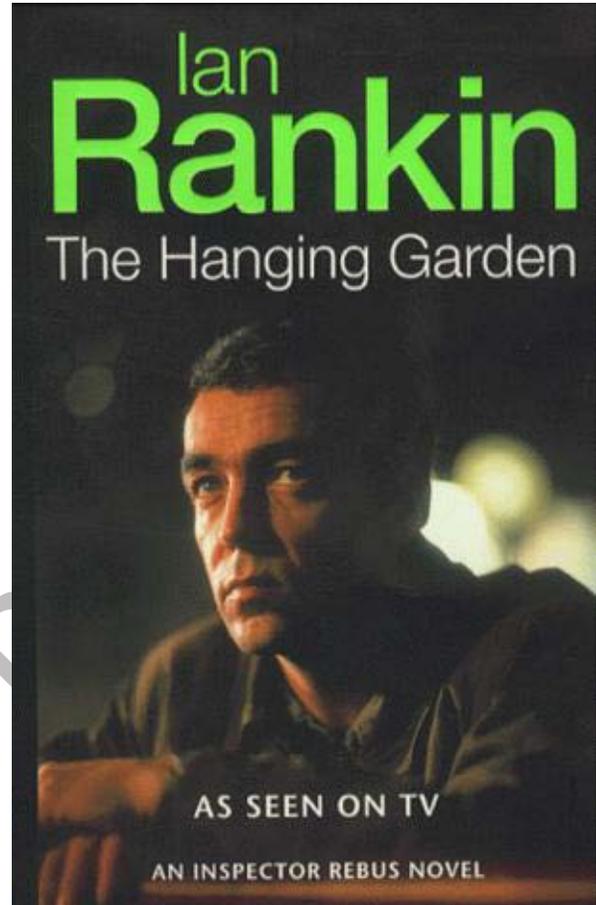
Ian Rankin's *The Hanging Garden*

by Jim Napier

Ian Rankin is at the vanguard of a new generation of mystery writers who promise to redefine the genre with fresh, new writing styles. Rankin has a talent for deftly integrating multiple sub-plots into his story lines. Set in contemporary Edinburgh, one gets a sense of the real city, not just a pastiche of warmed-over tourist guides. His dialogue is always fresh, the plots full of twists and turns, his characters multi-layered. It's no small feat when a dark novel, full of mean streets and even meaner people, can appeal to an audience raised on a diet of Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, but his latest is a book that will find a very wide audience indeed.

The plot: Edinburgh's trying-to-be-dry CID Inspector John Rebus, assisted by DC Siobhan Clarke and his boss, the taciturn Detective Superintendent "Farmer" Watson, is trying to prevent a full-out gang war between local crime-boss Big Ger Cafferty, who's currently a guest in one of Her Majesty's Prisons, and rival Tommy Telford, a particularly vicious version of local-boy-makes-good. When Rebus's daughter Sammy is hospitalised, the victim of a hit-and-run, he is torn between finding her attacker and preventing the turf war: Cafferty can help with both, but at a price. Complicating matters is a recent arrival on the scene of an upwardly-mobile thug, Jake Tarawicz, and a Bosnian prostitute on the run from her handler, who looks to Rebus to protect her.

If this was all there was to "The Hanging Garden" certainly it would be a fine read; but we have become accustomed to expect more from Ian Rankin, and we are not disappointed. When Edinburgh resident Joseph Lintz is suspected of being an ex-Nazi, Rebus



is assigned the case -- in part to get him off his own daughter's hit-and-run. Is Lintz in reality Josef Lintztek, an SS officer responsible for a wartime massacre in French village? Rebus finds himself between an Israeli Nazi-hunter and a shadowy figure from Special Branch, whom, it seems, would rather bury the whole issue. Wrestling with the bottle, the baddies and the bureaucrats, Rebus must try to prevent a turf war, find the person who ran down his daughter, provide a safe haven for an abused and terrified young woman and decide whether a reclusive, urbane and articulate recluse is responsible for murdering most of a village half a century ago.

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A multi-layered, fascinating work

The Hanging Garden is a multi-layered, satisfying work, with fascinating and wholly believable characters, fresh writing, a compelling plotline, and subtle shades of moral ambiguity that mark the maturity of crime fiction. In the works of Ian Rankin, Dasheill Hammett has at last met P.D. James. This is the ninth, and finest, tale in the already outstanding Rebus series. His previous novel, "Black and Blue" won the CWA award for Best Crime Novel of Year; it's difficult to imagine anything surpassing "The Hanging Garden." Beg, borrow or steal it — or better yet (I'm sure Ian would approve) buy it!

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