

Rebus Returns

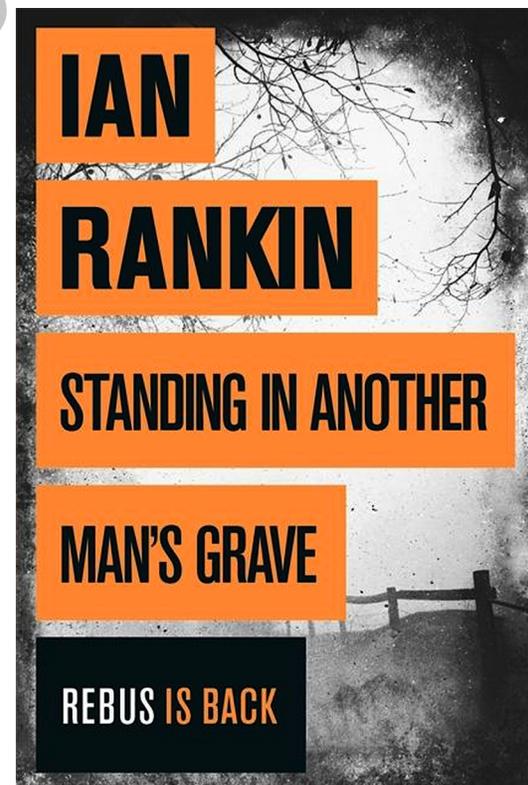
—*but Fox is on his case*

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND. Almost exactly a year ago I sat in a Montreal pub enjoying a pint of a certain well-known Irish libation with Scottish crime writer Ian Rankin. Putting it down for the moment I pointed out the ob-vious—that his many fans wanted to see his iconic character, John Rebus, return from an absence of more than five years. Ian said that it would be difficult, since Rebus had faced compulsory retirement. So I shifted gears and asked whether he'd considered doing a story focusing on Rebus's longtime colleague, Siobhan Clarke. Again he demurred, arguing it was difficult for male writers to write convincingly from a woman's perspective, although the reverse, we agreed, is not true. We discussed why that was, and settled, somewhat disturbingly, on the theory that it was because in most cases men simply weren't as perceptive as women. We moved on from that dark thought, returning to our drinks, and let the issue drop.

So imagine my surprise when less than a year later I discovered that Ian had indeed found a way to bring Rebus back in his latest novel, and with a nod to Siobhan as well. Given the delays involved in getting a manuscript to market, it must have been well under way when we had our discussion. Cheeky bugger, holding out like that!



Ian Rankin,
Standing In Another Man's
Grave
(Orion, 2012)

IT'S A NEW DAY—OR NOT. John Rebus is back in harness, working for his old force, the Lothian and Borders Police, this time as a civilian in a Cold Case Unit. His boss, DS Daniel Cowen, resents his posting as the only serving officer super-vising a bunch of over-the-hill ex-cops, and Rebus gives him plenty of attitude, further nursing the man's aggravation.

When Rebus is approached by a woman seeking information about her long-missing daughter, Rebus isn't sure he has anything to work with; she was eighteen, and a dozen years have passed since her disappearance and the original investigation. There was little to go on at the time, and since then the original case officers have either died or retired. But the woman points out that several other women have dropped out of sight over the ensuing years, and all in roughly the same region of rural Scotland. She's convinced there is a serial killer at work. His curiosity piqued, Rebus decides to look into the case; but with no real support from Cowan, and lacking even a warrant card, he's very much on his own. So what else is new?

Rebus is unaware that he's also in the crosshairs of another cop in Lothian and Borders. DI Malcolm Fox heads Ethics and Standards, the current incarnation of Internal Affairs, and he's convinced that John Rebus is dirty. He sets out to investigate the maverick copper, and it isn't long before he learns that Rebus has a more-or-less regular drinking partner, an ex-con known as Big Ger Cafferty. Is Rebus passing inside information to the former crime boss? To Fox, the issue is clear: *"The force had spent generations tolerating and turning a blind eye to cops like Rebus... Rebus was the last. He had to be convinced that his time was past."* But is Fox after Rebus because he thinks Rebus is corrupt, or because Rebus reminds him all too much of his own failings? And is Cafferty making sure he's seen palling around with the ex-cop in order to get revenge for Rebus's putting him away? Before long Siobhan Clarke is drawn into the fray, steering an uneasy course between supporting Rebus and trying to keep him from further antagonizing all those around him, as she and John struggle to puzzle out their personal relationship. Meanwhile, Cafferty plays a careful cat-and-mouse game with a local crime boss who took over his criminal ops while he was inside.

OPENING A NEW REBUS is akin to a heavy smoker peeling the cellophane from a new pack of cigarettes after going cold turkey for a month: you shake one out, put it to your mouth, light it and inhale deeply, savouring the aroma and letting the smoke work its way back to your throat and permeate your body. You exhale, taking your time, and once again, you're hooked. Rankin's latest will strike his fans much the same way, only without the guilt.

The Rebus series has long been a benchmark for contemporary noir,

and much of its appeal lies in Rankin's masterful use of layered sub-plots, Rebus's nuanced relationship with Siobhan Clarke, his taut alliance with former crime boss Big Ger Cafferty, and the tension between Rebus and the force—personified in the distrust Malcolm Fox has for him. These elements are every bit as compelling as the main story line, and raise Rankin to the very pinnacle of crime writers. His latest is very much up to the mark. Welcome back, Rebus!

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetinger*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, and *Type M for Murder*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

