

# Even Dogs in the Wild



## Author Background

### Ian Rankin

**Born:** April 28th 1960, Cardenden, Fife, Scotland

**Resides:** Edinburgh, Scotland

Ian Rankin was born and raised in the Kingdom of Fife, and graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1982. He began a PhD in Scottish Literature and spent the three years writing novels. After university he worked in various roles before his John Rebus series became popular. He worked as a grape-picker, swineherd, Hi-Fi journalist, a taxman, and at the National Folklore Centre in London.

Ian Rankin's first novel remains in his bottom drawer, but his second *The Flood* was published in 1986. The first Rebus novel *Knots and Crosses* was published in 1987. The Rebus series are now translated into 22 languages and have won many awards. Ian Rankin was also awarded an OBE for services to literature.

In an interview Ian Rankin said that he has always written:

*At the age of six or seven I would get sheets of A4 paper and fold them in half, cut the edges to make a little eight-page booklet, break it up into squares and put in little stick men with little speech bubbles, and I'd have a spy story, a space story and a football story.<sup>1</sup>*

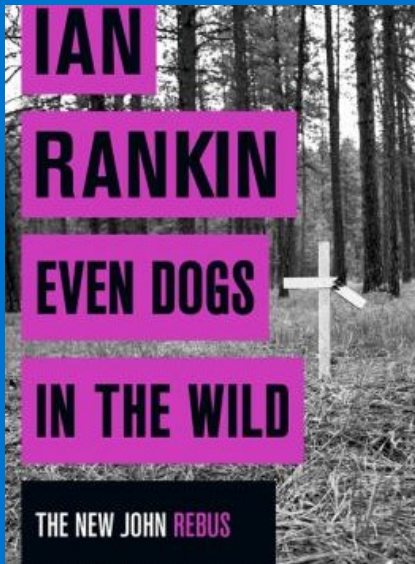
In the beginning Ian Rankin never imagined himself as a crime writer but now says that writing about Rebus and crime can be “therapeutic” and a “way of making sense of the world”.

*When you meet most crime writers they tend to be very quiet, well-balanced individuals, because there's an exorcism that takes place, all our demons go into the page.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Interview with Robert McCrum, *The Guardian Newspaper*, 18/3/2001

<sup>2</sup>Interview with Sheryl Mackay, *North by Northwest*, *CBC News*, 20/11/2015

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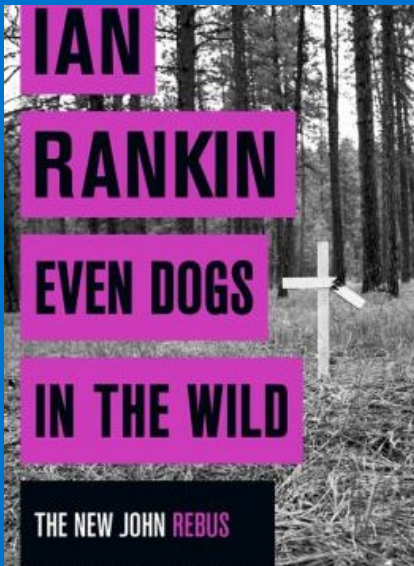


## Book Summary

*Hands in his pockets, Rebus turned to face Cafferty.  
They were old men now, similar builds, similar backgrounds.  
Sat together in a pub, the casual onlooker might mistake  
them for pals who'd known one another since school.  
But their history told a different story.*

*Even Dogs in the Wild* is the twentieth book featuring detective John Rebus, and in this book he comes out of retirement to help an old foe. Retirement doesn't suit John Rebus. He wasn't made for hobbies, holidays or home improvements. Being a cop is in his blood. So when DI Siobhan Clarke asks for his help on a case, Rebus doesn't need long to consider his options. Clarke's been investigating the death of a senior lawyer whose body was found along with a threatening note. On the other side of Edinburgh, Big Ger Cafferty – Rebus's long-time nemesis – has received an identical note and a bullet through his window. Now it's up to Clarke and Rebus to connect the dots and stop a killer. Meanwhile, DI Malcolm Fox joins forces with a covert team from Glasgow who are tailing a notorious crime family. There's something they want, and they'll stop at nothing to get it. It's a game of dog eat dog – in the city, as in the wild. *Even Dogs in the Wild* brings back Ian Rankin's greatest characters in a story exploring the darkest corners of our instincts and desires.

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## Discussion Questions

1. *Even Dogs in the Wild* didn't begin as a story about fathers and sons apparently, but there are certainly a few examples of both blood and circumstance father/son relationships. Which relationships did you find most true to life and why?
2. "As Rebus himself puts it, if justice didn't matter, *then neither did he*. The idea of justice as an extension of the male ego might sit uneasily in an era when the old tropes of masculinity are being questioned, but Rebus survives as a lovable and reliable relic".<sup>1</sup> Do you agree with this reviewer?
3. How does Rebus compare to other long-standing popular detectives created by British writers, such as Holmes, Poirot, Morse, or Dalgliesh? Are there more similarities or differences among them?
4. Ian Rankin has said,

*"Edinburgh is the perfect setting for crime writing, it has a split personality — on the one hand it is the city of history and museums and royalty, but at the same time there is this feeling that behind the thick walls of those Georgian townhouses there are all sorts of terrible things happening."*<sup>2</sup>

Did you feel that Edinburgh was a character in the story and, if you know the city, do you agree with Ian Rankin about the feeling it gives?

<sup>1</sup> Melanie McGrath, *The Guardian Australia*, 23/10/15

<sup>2</sup> Paul Davis, *The Washington Times*, 03/03/16

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## Discussion Questions (continued)

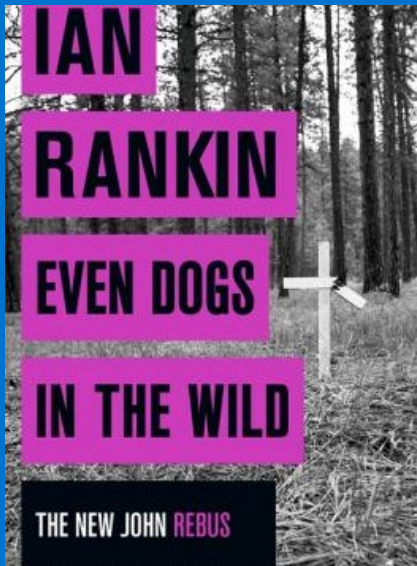
5. One reviewer suggests that the characters in Ian Rankin's Rebus stories don't really have friends, "they have alliances, acquaintances, professional colleagues, dear apprentices and rivals they have come to respect, but they are all strangely alone."<sup>3</sup> Do you agree? Does this add to, or subtract from, the stories for you?
6. Is this your first meeting with John Rebus? Do you think that you will go back for more, and why? If you have read others in the series how do you think this story compares to those you have read before?
7. How does Ian Rankin reveal himself as a writer interested in using fiction to "tell the truths the real world can't"?

*Just for fun*

8. How long do you think that Rebus will continue to work with the Edinburgh police? How do you imagine that his story might end?

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Kelly, *The Scotsman*, 22/11/15

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## Reviews

Once again, Rankin delivers all the elements that have brought him such a wide audience: playful dialogue, peppered with tangy banter and beefy put-downs, satisfying plot switchbacks, the dark, brooding setting of Edinburgh, and a strong thematic coherence. Plus musical references, as you'd expect, including the title, from an Associates song about parents failing to protect their offspring.

Rankin didn't get to be one of Britain's bestselling crime novelists without knowing that tales of bad men offing one another would quickly flatline without a heart. Here, the ticker is kept ticking by the friction between Fox, characterised by his colleague as a "soulless, spiritless middle manager from the most boring company on the planet", and the older Rebus.

Melanie McGrath, *The Guardian Australia*

All of this is handled with the authority that we have come to expect from the previous nineteen Rebus books. One particularly masterful move is to stir into the narrative Rankin's second male protagonist, DI Malcolm Fox, the by-the-book, more conventional copper who appeared to be being groomed as Rebus's successor.

Previously, Rankin never quite solved the problem of making a character he himself regarded as "boring" intriguing to the reader, but the unassuming Fox proves to be an invaluable element in the mix when set as counterpoint to his very different predecessor. One wonders if this was always Rankin's agenda – he was prepared to take on board criticism that Fox wasn't very colourful as he had a long game in mind. Whatever Ian Rankin's reasoning, Rebus is back, and fans will be pleased that the detective's retirement is proving just as temporary as Frank Sinatra's was.

Barry Forshaw, *Independent*



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## Reviews (continued)

Rankin has steadily improved as a writer over the course of his career and *Even Dogs In The Wild* is clearly by an author at the top of his game. The story flows smoothly and the plotting is flawless, with numerous twists and turns. The well-fleshed-out characters are engaging and interesting and the story keeps a tight grip on the reader's attention until the final dark twist.

The book also contains the usual Rankin trademarks: the use of musical references, the familiar evocative, clear-eyed descriptions of Edinburgh and Rankin's wry sense of humour. There is also a melancholy feel to the story, with frequent reflections by Rebus on opportunities lost, the passage of time and growing older:

*'It feels like the end of a long song, though – men like Cafferty and Joe Stark ... and me too, come to that. We're on our last legs. Our way of doing things seems ... I don't know.' 'Last century?' 'Aye, maybe.'*

Jeff Popple, *The Sydney Morning Herald*

This is a novel as canny and subtle, as grimy and noble, as the hero he has introduced to the pantheon of sleuths. Rebus, now retired, is brought back as a “consulting detective”, a sly wee wink to Arthur Conan Doyle, to help out Siobhan Clarke and Malcolm Fox. The most notable thing about this return for Rebus is how Rankin is at his best when he is choreographing an ensemble cast.

There is a line during Malcolm Fox's scene waiting to see his ill father: *No, it was his father's sour realism he'd reached out for – and part of him still wanted it* – that seems to me to encapsulate the Rankin aesthetic. He depicts a world where the good are frustrated and compromised, where the villains have a code of honour and where the wicked go unpunished.

Stuart Kelly, *The Scotsman*