



Strip Jack

Ian Rankin

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When respected MP Gregor Jack is caught in a police raid on an Edinburgh brothel and his flamboyant wife Elizabeth suddenly disappears, John Rebus smells a set-up. And when Elizabeth's badly beaten body is found, Rebus is suddenly up against a killer who holds all the cards..

Strip Jack Details

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From Reader Review Strip Jack for online ebook

Joanna says

This book was my first foray into the Inspector Rebus series, and it was quite an enjoyable one. It had all the elements of a good mystery -multiple suspects, interwoven crimes, red herrings galore, and a detective with loads of intellect and personality to tie it all together.

I also liked how uniquely Scottish the book felt. The accents, the language, the constant misting rain - all added a terrific amount of atmosphere.

But the thing I liked best was Rebus' ability to be wrong. To get the right clues, but not read them in the right order or draw the correct conclusions. I loved that a lot of the mystery solving was luck, or team work, or the result of general stubbornness.

My only critique is that the ending left many a motive still muddled. It wasn't a clear cut solution, which I often expect from a mystery novel. But it was a good read, with a great sleuth at the heart of it.

John says

I was really disappointed with this book, especially considering Rankin talks about his coming of age as a writer in the introduction. I thought that this was far and away his weakest Rebus novel so far.

The story wasn't particularly gripping, few unanticipated twists and turns, and very little tension. There was also the noisy narrator, lots of clichés and verbal mannerisms which I suppose to be Rebus's inner voice, but were off-putting and annoying and made it harder for me to like the man.

This is the fourth of the series, and I guess I'll give it another go and read the fifth: "Black Books", but I'll do so with far less enthusiasm.

David says

In my opinion, Ian Rankin is well in amongst the cream at the very top in crime fiction, and in Inspector Rebus he has created a doubly original detective as interesting in his own way as Sherlock Holmes. In 'Strip Jack' Rebus searches what passes as his soul over his domestic future. Long resigned to never going higher in the ranks, he wears his rank of inspector with dissatisfied satisfaction. Unlike nearly all fictional detectives since Holmes; who have a moral centre of integrity, and absolutes (right versus wrong, good versus evil); Rebus has a sense of justice, but is not always as impartial as one would like and, with a large dose of moral relativity, views the ends as justifying the means. In one novel he leaks out that a convicted paedophile has moved into a block of flats with fatal consequences. It's only then that he has pause for unpleasant thought. In 'Strip Jack' Jack is an MP, Rebus uses trickery to get into his home the day after the Jack was found in a brothel. Rankin then takes Rebus on a trail of investigatory leads which seem connected but, even with discovery of his wife's apparently mutilated body, they all seem to lead nowhere in particular.

The ending is in trademark Rankin fashion not all tidy, with all the ends neatly bowed, but in 'Strip Jack' there are maybe too many left hanging or tied together uncharacteristically clumsily. It is a possible conclusion, no 'deus ex machina' for Rankin; but, all said and done, not an entirely adequate or satisfying one for me. To me, the picture we are left with at the conclusion is too radically different from what was shaping up to it - and not in a good way, where expectations are neatly turned to a different direction but which can be seen with hindsight to be there all along.

Of course, no book by Ian Rankin, especially where Inspector Rebus is involved, can be a disaster and this is far from being one. It remains full of Scottish cheer (the same as everyone else's but, unless it's hogmonay, without the cheer), Rebus's cynicism shines through. He is a beacon of darkness, but his disorganised humanity, tenacity to find the truth (even if he does spend too much time looking for it at the bottom of a whisky bottle) continues to get him the frustrated and sometimes resigned respect of his superiors, and junior officers continue to follow him, often despite themselves. For the reader, this can make him one of the most believable and, in ways other detectives can't match, attractive of detectives. All in all, a bit of a flawed gem for me but nonetheless an entertaining, very readable novel. Still streets ahead of the competition.

Steve says

In this installment, the author has found his unique style, and this book sizzles. John Rebus doggedly chases clues to the confusion and frustration of his lover and his bosses. This is the kind of book you don't want to end.

Carolyn says

This is the fourth book in Ian Rankin's series starring the smart but independent detective Rebus. At this stage of the series Rebus has not evolved into the complex character that we see in the later books and the crime story has a relatively simple plot. Nevertheless Rebus is true to form, disheveled and anti-authoritarian, living a bachelor existence in his bland flat and grungy pubs, constantly letting his girlfriend down by missing dates and prevaricating about moving in with her.

The plot centres around an Edinburgh MP, Gregor Jack who is caught in a raid on a brothel. The press have been tipped off about the raid leading Rebus to think the popular MP has been set up by one of his political enemies. When Gregor's wife, the party loving Elizabeth, goes missing, Rebus suspects a plot to oust the MP and sets out to find the missing woman and the truth.

This is a novel set very firmly in Scotland with Rebus' investigations take him not only into the rough side and the privileged side of Edinburgh but also into the towns of nearby Fife and the highlands of Scotland. The landscape is often bleak or rugged and beautiful and the weather is often dreary and this all adds atmosphere to the basic plot, along with the authentic sounding Scottish dialogue. A very good basic, gritty crime story. Love it!

Cat says

The 4th book in the Rebus series sees our leading character back in Edinburgh and in a new relationship with

Dr Patience Atkin. Rebus is without a doubt more comfortable in his native Edinburgh and in this book I would say he is at his most stable so far. That said, it wouldn't be Rebus if there weren't dark clouds up ahead and doubts about his future, or more specifically his and Patience's future. Forever tied to his job and unable to put his love life first I found it amusing that a decision about whether to move in with Patience is weighted by whether he continues to be based at the Greater London Road police station or moved to St Leonards. For those who've read subsequent or more recent Rebus books...well you know the outcome.

Of the Rebus books so far I would say Strip Jack is the more straight forward "who dun nit" with a little bit of Rebus intuition thrown in. The book starts with a raid on an Edinburgh brothel, where amongst the many punters the police find a popular young MP Gregor Jack. Despite the secrecy of the raid upon exiting the building the road is lined with press. Something about this doesn't sit well with Rebus, it just seems too lucky for the press to be there. When Jack's wife Elizabeth disappears Rebus can't help but feel there is a bigger game at foot and starts to explore the social and personal lives of Gregor and Elizabeth Jack and their friends. A disappearance becomes a murder. There is pressure on the police to quickly solve it but Rebus isn't convinced they're following the right line of enquiry. True to himself and like a dog with a bone Rebus won't give up. Was Gregor Jack set up? Who can be trusted? Where was Elizabeth murdered? Step by step Rebus unravels the story in a way only he can.

Without becoming uncontrollable in twists and turns there are enough red herrings and sub-plots in Strip Jack to keep us all guessing. The cast is larger than previous books, giving Rankin an opportunity to develop more colourful and varied characters and in doing so giving Rebus more reflections to compare and judge himself against. With this book we are seeing a world evolve around the Inspector. In subsequent correspondence Ian Rankin has spoken about his decision with this book to take Rebus out of a fictional Edinburgh and into a more real one. In the short series so far geography and in particular Edinburgh and its surrounding areas have proven to be a key building block of the books. These books more so than any other series I have read place a city at its heart. Edinburgh is as much a reoccurring character as Brian Holmes, Gill Templer, "Farmer Watson" and in the later books Siobhan Clarke and "Big Ger Cafferty". Whether it is the return from London, or this decision to make Edinburgh more real, in Strip Jack Rebus feels more grounded and secure in his role at the station, his stage in life and quite possibly in his romantic life.

It goes without saying that I'm a huge fan of Ian Rankin's work, I wouldn't be re-reading the series from start if I wasn't. I really enjoyed this book and felt like you could feel Rankin getting to grips with his plot structure, character development and starting to bring multiple dimensions to his main man. A review of the book I recently read seemed to lament on the absence of the gruff, self-loathing critical rebel we know from later books. If you're not reading the books in order I can understand why someone would question Rebus' approach in this book but I would say to them, start at the beginning, travel with him, because only then can you truly understand the infuriating loner who wins the sympathy of readers time and time again.

Andrew Smith says

As I continue my journey through the early episodes of this excellent crime series, I reach book 4. Detective Inspector Rebus is as curmudgeon as ever and still can't quite bring himself to give any real respect to authority. His personal life is in some disorder too. He really must devote some time to sorting this out. Why does he make life so difficult for himself?

Here he's handed the case of some missing books (yes, he *was* suitably underwhelmed) and attended the storming of a brothel, where a local MP was found to be on the premises. Add to this the fact that a woman's

body has been dragged from a nearby river and you can see that there's plenty enough crime floating around (excuse the pun) to fill a couple of hundred pages.

Of course, there are complications to each of the cases, and potential linkages too. And there's a handy batch of suspects for Rebus to focus his attention on: a group of the MP's friends, known as 'the pack'. The fun here, as is always the case with this series, is simply in being in the company of the cranky and quick-lipped detective. His dry one-liners come thick and fast and his tired wisdom is ever evident too. He's a brilliant character; it almost doesn't matter whether the plot's any good or not.

As it happens, the plot is satisfying too. It's complex and twisty enough to keep most crime fiction fans guessing – but then Rankin is a class act, you'd expect no less. If you haven't caught up with this series yet, then you have a major delight to come and if you're already a seasoned aficionado but have somehow missed this one then seek it out – you won't be disappointed.

Mal Warwick says

In Ian Rankin's *Strip Jack*, the fourth novel in his long-running murder mystery series, the newly promoted Edinburgh police Inspector John Rebus is decidedly unenthusiastic about the latest assignment from his sanctimonious boss, Chief Superintendent "Farmer" Watson. Rebus is ordered to join a large task force assembled for a midnight raid on a high-end brothel, where he dreads the idea of unmasking members of the city's elite. However, once the police have stormed the house, he is surprised to find Gregor Jack MP sitting on a bed with an unclothed young woman. Jack has a reputation as both a man of integrity and a diligent representative of his constituency's interests in London. "Most MPs, Rebus wouldn't have given the time of day. But Gregor Jack was . . . well, he was Gregor Jack . . . 'Mild' was an adjective often used about Jack. So were 'honest,' 'legal' and 'decent.'" Though fully clothed himself in the brothel, Jack's carefully cultivated image is in tatters after he is marched in front of the cameras on his way to the police van that will take him into the station for questioning.

For Rebus, there are three questions to be answered: who informed the Chief Superintendent about the existence of the brothel, why was the MP found there, and who tipped off the press? These three questions turn out to be the key to unraveling a complex mystery surrounding two presumably linked murders that bedevil the police and entertain the press for weeks on end. Another, much less urgent case—the theft of several rare first editions from the home of a divinity professor at the University of Edinburgh—also proves to be crucial to identifying the murderer.

In the course of the investigation, Rebus and his colleagues are forced to navigate through the byzantine relationships among the friends surrounding Jack and his wife, Elizabeth, who is one of the murder victims. Rebus is convinced that one of these family friends is Elizabeth's murderer, but a homeless and seemingly deranged man has confessed to both murders—and then fled. The Chief Superintendent and the Chief Inspector who is Rebus' immediate superior are focused on tracking down the man and imprisoning him for both crimes. They're under pressure from the police, and from Elizabeth's influential father, to close the case quickly. Rebus is convinced that the man's confession is full of holes. But he must work around his bosses to follow his instinct on a parallel investigation.

Strip Jack was published in 1992 and reflects police procedures and the technology available at that time. For example, a telephone booth figures in the mystery in a major way.

In the John Rebus mysteries, Ian Rankin makes generous use of words known only to Scots. For instance, “Both men had zippered their jackets against the snell wind and the occasional smirr.” Because Rankin is himself Scottish and has lived in Edinburgh for most of his life, I don’t hold this against him. Certainly, it’s easier to excuse than the pretentious practice of some English-language writers to sprinkle words and phrases in French or Italian throughout their books.

The title of this novel comes from a card game called “Strip Jack Naked” that is also sometimes known (in Scotland, presumably) as “Beggar Thy Neighbour.”

Rusalka says

I do like me a good, large group of school friends murder mystery.

Ross Cumming says

I came a bit late to Ian Rankin's work and I'm slowly working my way through the Rebus series of novels, this being the fourth in the series.

In this novel Rebus is present at the raid on an Edinburgh brothel when MP Gregory Jack is discovered on the premises, as one of the 'punters'. The press are out in force at the scene of the raid and Rebus thinks they may have been tipped off and thinks that Jack may have been set up. When the MP's flamboyant wife disappears, only to be found murdered and a 'suspect' turns up confessing to the crime, Rebus decides to take the investigation into his own hands. Throw in Jack's group of ex-school friends which include a film star, a dodgy businessman, a rare bookseller, an architect and a convicted murderer it all adds up to a great 'whodunit'.

This time we find Rebus back on familiar territory in Edinburgh, with a new 'love' in the form of Dr Patience but he still holds a small flame for ex-lover Gill Templar. He is, as usual, at loggerheads with his senior officers but he plays them off nicely against one another and he has his newly promoted sidekick Brian Holmes to rely on.

I found this the most lighthearted and funny of the series so far, as a lot of Rebus's brooding seems to have deserted him to be replaced with a world weary sense of black humour. His love life is also looking brighter, although at times he does do his best to unwittingly screw up the relationship. There are a lot of characters to keep up with but each are quite unique and I was able to keep track of who was who, and who did what. All in all another good read and I'm quickly becoming a Rebus fan and I'm in for the long haul I fear.

Kate Merriman says

Loved this taut, character-rich, smart detective novel. In fact, reading this was so freakin' satisfying that I felt ticked about the time I've wasted recently on some new books that were marketed with a lot of vigor but left me wondering how they even got published. I was starting to think I was just not enjoying reading any more - a sad thought. But no, just sad excuses being published and promoted. How does that happen? I thought it was so competitive to get published. Oh well.

I remember reading that Jean Paul Sartre read detective mysteries for pleasure. Sometimes I've thought, wow, that's sort of embarrassing, isn't it.

But not today! Ian Rankin writes circles around these ridiculous authors I've tried lately. Life's too short, man. I need to trust my gut!

Ellen says

Strip Jack by Ian Rankin.

The golden age of Scottish mysteries has arrived with Inspector Rebus. Mark this story as on the same level as John Dickson Carr at his best.

A must read for all addicted to elaborately entangled mysteries.

James Love says

The title is a tongue in cheek reference to a card game called "Strip Jack Naked" or "Bugger Your Neighbor". The title may also be a criminal conspiracy to strip Scottish MP Gregor Jack of his position and property which is an all too familiar idea in the climate of American politics today.

The aforementioned Scottish MP is found during the raid of a suspected brothel. While being a customer of such an establishment is not a criminal offence under Scottish law it does attack and impugn the integrity of the customer. Add to that the subsequent disappearance and then reappearance of the customer's wife as the victim of a murder and the political mayhem just naturally follows.

The author asks in the disguise of his main character, "What happens to sanity when you chain it to a wall?" As a current student of Criminology that is a very valid question.

The book was made into an episode of the Ken Stott series Rebus, in 2006, for British television. The only issue I have is that upon watching the show I often feel no need to read the book. By not reading the book the previous quote would have been missed by me and the valid question would remain unasked of me.

Gesine says

I love Rebus. Set in Scotland with a music and book loving, grumpy detective. What's not to love?

Jill Hutchinson says

An early entry in the Inspector Rebus series, when he was gentler and kinder.....well, at least somewhat. This is a short book and a quick and satisfactory read. A popular and squeaky clean MP is caught in a police raid of a high class brothel. It appears that someone has notified the press ahead of time and they are waiting at the door with cameras ready. The MP's wife, daughter of a rich and powerful industrialist, is out of town and can't be located. It doesn't take long to find her.....dead and dumped in a local river. But that is just the beginning of a series of strange and twisting story lines that will keep you guessing. I did guess who the

murderer was but as Rebus would say, it was just "an inspired thought".

I like the earlier Rebus books since he becomes a nasty piece of work in later stories. I would suggest that readers new to the series, read in somewhat of a chronological order to see how the author develops the character over the years.

Margaret says

An MP is found in a brothel during a raid, and it looks like someone set him up to be caught there. Then his wife goes missing and John Rebus is dealing with an entirely new ball game.

This one is a little bit different than the later Rebus novels. It has a gentle, distinctly whimsical feel to it. Ian Rankin's turns of phrase are often quite witty and whimsical.

It's an oddly delightful book.

Highly recommended.

Carolyn (in SC) C234D says

Love this series. An MP is picked up in a raid on a brothel, then a short time later his wife's body is found. Rebus smells a set-up.

It's time to find another book in the series to read, hope I have one!

Rachel Hall says

As is the case with several of these early Rebus novels, the plot is secondary to the performance of the man and almost inconsequential to a reader's enjoyment of this novel. The magic is delivered by Inspector John Rebus and the delight is in reading Ian Rankin's outstanding prose and the dialogue he attributes to Rebus. This is our hero in his prime; grumpy, cynical, anti-authoritarian and, as ever, quick with a pithy retort. Rebus has the timing of a comedy legend and with his newly promoted DS Brian Holmes these two are fast becoming quite the double act.

When Chief Superintendent 'Farmer' Watson oversees a raid on a brothel that happens to be "on the right side of town" there is no telling who might be visiting the establishment. To Rebus, 'Operation Creeper' smacks of a publicity stunt and as expected the press are ready and waiting, not just the local media but the nationals from down south to boot. After the discovery of MP Gregor Jack in one of the bedrooms Rebus is not the only one in the force that feels uncomfortable at exposing the MP, regarded as an honest and thoroughly decent chap and begins to suspect that the press could have been tipped off. Rebus is intrigued by what appears to be someone seeking to bring Gregor Jack down, and the closer he looks at the varied circle of friends who are never far away he isn't short of candidates. Firstly though Rebus has to track down Liz, Jack's strangely absent wife, and from then onwards the questions seem to keep asking themselves.

Aside from the brothel raid Rebus is on the altogether more mundane case of the 'Lifted Literature', namely on the hunt for some stolen rare books and finds himself trawling the specialist bookshops in Edinburgh, only to discover the first shop he enters is half owned by the right honourable MP himself. Add to this the discovery of two bodies in a nearby river, one of whom is found to be Jack's wife and everything starts pointing in one direction. Conveniently the three cases all seem to involve Gregor Jack and Rebus finds himself in a chase to track down the perpetrator seeking to instigate the man's downfall.

Strip Jack is another exploration of the Jekyll and Hyde influence as is the case with many of the early Rebus novels. Rankin delivers a thoughtful message, specifically that people hide behind a veneer of respectability and you never know how many layers you have to strip back to reveal the real man hidden underneath. A meaty story full of action, with cameo appearances by both Inspector George Flight (Tooth and Nail) and former love interest Gill Templer. Splendid humour throughout and expect plenty of jokes about Gregor Jack doing a spot of canvassing at 1am and references to the 'male member'.

Sit back and enjoy!

Ryan Mishap says

I found this fourth installment clearly a cut above (no pun intended Mack) the previous three. A blurb on the back called the narrative style "eccentric" and that's not only bloody accurate but he left off brilliant. It wraps you up in Scottish tartan and gives you a sense of place. It lets you hear Rebus's thoughts (and other's) in a low-key way--letting us experience what he does and revealing his flaws as well as his talents. The generous word-play is a pleasant bonus. Crikey, I wouldn't have even cared if the mystery was shite I was having so much fun.

Call it 4.5 stars and I look forward to the rest of this series.

Alondra says

4 Full Stars.

Scandal, murder... who dunit?? With multiple suspects and lame alibis, who killed the victim?? Just when your suspicions seem confirmed, they go in a different direction; but find yourself back at square one. KISS

This series is definitely picking up. Rebus is a hoot, and Holmes is a close second.
