Novelist Ian Rankin recalls his start in literature: drawing comic books as a kid
By Adriana Delgado
The Palm Beach Post

For thriller writer Ian Rankin, his native Scotland is not only a prominent character in all of his novels, but also a main source of inspiration. Rankin was recently at Murder on the Beach Bookstore in Delray Beach to hold a talk and book signing for his new novel, “In A House Of Lies.”

The book stars his often disgraced protagonist John Rebus, a nose-to-the-ground now retired detective, who seems more keen on breaking the rules rather than reinforcing them. But Rebus does get the bad guys, even if he sometimes has to rely on some of Rankin’s shadiest characters for assistance, like gangster and villain Morris Gerald Cafferty. Rankin explains that this double-sided persona, that of the hero and anti-hero in the same body is fascinating to him. “Rebus is the last of his kind, who could get away with bending the rules,” Rankin said. “He was doing police work before CCTV and cell phones, which makes him great fun to write.”

Rankin also adds that Scotland’s atmosphere is perfect for a dark detective thriller. “Scotland is a pretty atmospheric place, and a city like Edinburgh has plenty of atmospheric locations in them,” Rankin said. “It’s influenced perhaps by the Scottish Gothic novel, which is quite dark and has elements of the supernatural to it. That allows for terrible things to be happening in very beautiful places.”

But even through he’s considered one of the most prominent Scottish crime writers, Rankin began writing detective thrillers entirely by accident. “I’m the only mystery writer that I know of who wasn’t a fan of the genre before starting to write it,” Rankin confesses. “I was studying at Edinburgh University and doing a doctorate thesis on the Scottish novel, specifically on the works of Muriel Spark, who wrote one of the most famous Edinburgh novels, “The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.” But it was set in the ’30s and published in the ’60s and I thought that no one seemed to be writing about contemporary Edinburgh.”

In Spark’s novel, Brodie tells us that she is the descendant of a real-life Scottish man, William Brody, who was described as a mystery master.
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RANKIN
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as being “a gentleman by day and a fighter by night.”

“I thought of modern day Edinburgh as being a sort of Jekyll and Hyde, and cultured on the surface, but quite dark and dangerous underneath.” Rankin said.

“So I wanted to write about that, and thought that the cop is a character that can explore both sides of the city, the good and the bad, the heroes and the have-nots.”

Rabe also faces a new challenge in Rankin’s new novel: old age and retirement. This does not sit well with a man who wants to be as close to the action as possible.

But as Rankin explains, he made Rebus too old from the start and there came a point where he would have to go on medical retirement.

“My wife said to me that Rabes (Rabes) had been very lucky with his health considering his lifestyle.” Rankin said.

“But I’ve been writ- ing this guy for over thirty years, and what keeps fresh is that he keeps changing. Everything’s moving on, technology, his relation- ships. The challenge now is how do you get a retired cop involved in a police story? Obviously it’s not easy, to be sure.

What makes ‘A House of Lies’ particularly engrossing is that the plot is in a similar to a true cold case, in which a private detective is found dead in a parking garage years after he disappeared.

“Rankin says that the story came together fully organically, and that it gave him the idea of including

From left) Elizabeth Simon, Ashley Rose, Blake Price and Amy Miller (Orennessa star in Palmer Beach Dramaworks’ production of “The Spitfire Grill” over through MARCH 3, 2019 (CONTRIBUTED BY ALESHA PAUL)

THE SPOILS

“The Spitfire Grill”

No matter what kind of week you’ve had, a musical can really make a dif- ferential — especially when produced by Palm Beach Dramaworks — is one to brighten your mood. Now through March 3, the company is presenting “The Spitfire Grill,” a heartfelt musical that tells of the tale of a young parolee starting over at Hannah’s Spitfire Grill in rural Wisconsin. Tickets are selling quickly, so be sure to get them soon!

“The Spitfire Grill” Run through March 3. Tickets are $75. Palm Beach Dramaworks, 201 Clematis St., West Palm Beach. Info: 561-354-4042 or www.palmbeachdramaworks.org

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There’s a natural sym- biosis between the art of sculpture and the craft of carpentry. If that doesn’t ring true to you, make your way to Mounts Botanical Garden where you can experience “Cutting Corners,” a project by North Carolina-based artist Patrick Dougherty, famous for his massive environmental Stickwork projects. The exhibition col- laborated with Stickwork artist Mounts, where guests can walk within and appreci- ate art and nature as they effortlessly intertwine. “Cutting Corners: A Stickwork Exhibit” Now through June 2019. Admission is $5 for adults, $3 for children ages 5 to 12. Mounts Botanical Garden, 531 N. Military Trail, West Palm Beach. Info: 561-795-1757 or www.mounts.org.

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Ilan Ranks signs books for readers at Murder on the Beach Bookstore.

(AARON BILWARD/PALMBEACHPOST.COM)

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