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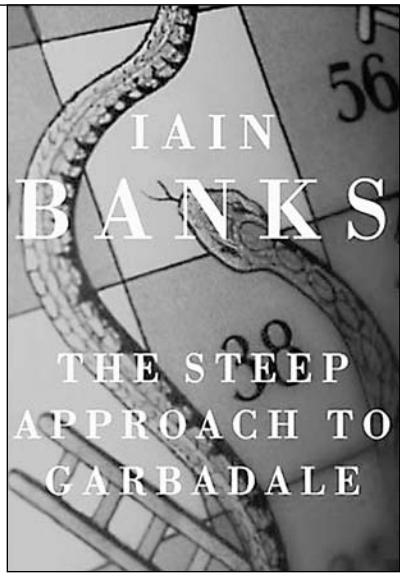
Down an Old Road

Iain Banks' return to simple storytelling

A friend introduced me to Iain Banks about nine years ago with *The Crow Road*. I loved the novel and immediately wanted more. However, my friend had never read another one of Banks' several works; he thought it was obviously the author's masterpiece, and anything else would pale in comparison and likely ruin his enjoyment of *The Crow Road*. Thinking this was one of the stupidest things I've ever heard, I eagerly ripped through many others. And now, finally, nine years later, I've found one that lives up to the memory of my first Banks novel.

The Steep Approach To Garbadale takes a while to get into. The Wopulds are a British family made rich by the game an ancestor invented called Empire!, which sounds suspiciously like Risk. The business is in jeopardy of being bought out by a big bad American corporation and the family is torn between keeping the company and staying rich—or selling and getting richer. We're introduced to a shwack of relatives who live on estates the sizes of small countries and I just had a hard time relating to their particular brand of strife.

The only quasi-sympathetic character is a disgruntled grandson, Alban, who is living poorly in Scotland out of choice and



The Steep Approach to Garbadale
by Iain Banks
Abacus, 512 pages, \$18.50

could obviously go back to the grand lifestyle whenever he wanted. Still, he manages to grow on the reader. Once I was able to put aside my impatience for the trifling of the über-elite, I quickly became involved in Alban's story: the tragedy of his mother, his young infatuation with his cousin and his struggle to create an identity in spite of his overpowering family.

While Banks tends to enjoy the mysterious (*The Business*), the disturbing (*The Wasp Factory*) or just plain weird (*The Bridge*), he is particularly good at telling a simple story well. That may not sound like much praise, but how many books have you come across that try to hoodwink you into believing they're new or fresh or clever when really there is nothing beyond the flashy cover? These days good, solid storytelling is hard to come by. That's what I loved about *The Crow Road* and what Banks has achieved again with *Garbadale*.

To clarify, by simple I don't mean easy. I mean taking away all the frills and gimmicks and just telling a story about real people put in believable circumstances and exploring how events would likely unfold. In this case, Banks has taken a large family whose identity is wrapped around a business and spends 390 pages just watching them struggle through their day to day lives. We see them compete, scheme, lie and hurt each other as individuals while protecting and defending "the family." And somewhere along the line we become heavily invested in Alban and the Empire! regime. There is nothing easy about that. Keeping readers engaged in a straightforward story is difficult and authors that do it well have my admiration.

Garbadale is a back-to-the-basics book for Banks, one that was a long time coming and is much appreciated. And did I mention *The Crow Road* is really good too?

—Sarah Gignac

Get Slashed

Definitely one to keep away from the kiddies, this tell-all tale from one of rock's coolest guitarists (oh, come on, he is) falls dangerously close to being just another drugged-out confessional, but redeems itself with amazing stories of what really went on behind the scenes as Guns N' Roses were falling apart. Heck, even as they were rising to fame, they were still living like complete scumbags (which would have blown my 10-year-old mind as I was rocking out to *Appetite for Destruction*). When Slash gets into what was happening when they were the biggest (and most dysfunctional) band in the world, he starts answering questions that have been in the back (uh, OK, front) of my mind for 15 years. Why did the band always start their shows so late? Why did Slash leave the band? (See first question—the main reason was the disrespect towards the fans that these constant late shows gave.) Ultimately, this is a positive story, as Slash leaves his worst habits behind, starts up another hugely successful band (Velvet Revolver) and finds himself staring at instructions on how to build a crib. At times a bit too heavy on the trippy drug tales, this is still generally fascinating stuff for the rock fan.



Slash
By Slash and Anthony Bozza
Harper Collins, 462 pages, \$32.95

—Greg Pratt

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