



## The Wasp Factory

*Iain Banks*

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## **The Wasp Factory** Iain Banks

Meet Frank Cauldhame. Just sixteen, and unconventional to say the least:

Two years after I killed Blyth I murdered my young brother Paul, for quite different and more fundamental reasons than I'd disposed of Blyth, and then a year after that I did for my young cousin Esmerelda, more or less on a whim.

That's my score to date. Three. I haven't killed anybody for years, and don't intend to ever again.

It was just a stage I was going through.

## **The Wasp Factory Details**

Date : Published 1998 by Simon & Schuster (NYC) (first published 1984)

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Author : Iain Banks

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## From Reader Review The Wasp Factory for online ebook

### Manny says

I admit it's a narrow demographic. But if this is you, then I promise you're gonna love it.

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### Lisa says

"What are you reading?"

"Ehum, a book I bought at Gatwick airport last week!"

"Do you like it?"

"No."

"What is it about?"

"Psychopaths talking about the microscopic details of their murderous actions, explaining them away with even worse psychopathic deeds that they fell victim to, watered down to banal cause-and-effect psychology!"

"What? Who would read that kind of book? Sounds hard?"

"Well, on the pro side, the language is simplistic, the plot is absurd, and it is short, so I think it caters to young adults with a short attention span and an obsession for violence in different drastic forms!"

"Well, we live in a violent world, that is reality!"

"Yes. True! I doubt we would see a father trying to change the gender of his child, though, and a murderer who proudly announces three completed murders before reaching adolescence, - using bombs, snakes and kites to kill off even younger children in the family - explaining it "with hindsight" at age seventeen as a "phase" he went through because of some very odd Freudian sexual issues and stereotypical misogyny!"

"Eh?"

"Yes, I know!"

"Why do you read that kind of trash?"

"Dunno! Motives are bizarre sometimes? Cheap and easy entertainment? Fascination with vulgarity? I was bored at the airport and paid for it? People like violence, especially against women, children and animals. They like to be confronted with bodily functions and exact descriptions of drunken vomit. They like it in the way they like brutal computer games and stupid television shows."

"It's not funny, though!"

"Isn't it? Isn't it funny when a murderer stops to contemplate the fact that he might look a bit silly, like Mr Spock, when he is working on his sinister plans?"

"You sound sarcastic and angry!"

"I am! Angry that I read this book! The vulgarity of the world makes me angry. We have abolished Ancient Roman gladiator games and Medieval public executions, only to find ourselves being completely absorbed by morbid stories, psychopaths and their victimization. I am angry! I've had enough!"

As I only review what I finish, though, I forced myself to read to the last page. Fully aware that my review will be different from most others' opinion on this novel, I have to voice my anger at the shallow violence voyeurism, exaggerated to the point of becoming bizarre satire without sense or meaning. If you think it is funny to read about a child exploding, please consider this a roller coaster of the most hilarious kind.

Recommended for those who would have enjoyed sitting in the Colosseum watching animals and humans tear each other apart for the entertainment of the bored SPQR. Recommended for those who wouldn't have missed spitting in the face of a condemned witch before watching every detail of her skin burning while she's publicly suffering at the stake in the Middle Ages. Recommended for whoever needs a bit of sexually motivated, absurd, unrealistic violence every page or two to keep reading. Recommended for those who sit in front of brutal computer games and laugh out loud whenever the pressing of a button causes a virtual character to go "BOOOOOM", body parts graphically flying over the whole screen. Recommended for those who like violence for violence's sake, and who do not need (or want) any other *raison d'être* for so-called literature.

As for me, I'll make a check on my list of "tried and failed to like another hailed mainstream author".

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### **Lynne King says**

I sat on the terrace and looked down the valley to the backdrop of the Pic d'Anie in the Pyrenean mountain range. As I read the last sentence of *The Wasp Factory*, I closed my Kindle and smiled and thought about this extraordinary book. If I hadn't seen Richard's excellent review the other day, I wouldn't have purchased it in a million years. But strangely enough I could get the feeling that I would enjoy this book purely from the title. Something drummed in my brain that I had to read this.

This is not my genre at all and I see that it's referred to as a Gothic horror and yet, I started to read it and couldn't put it down. I really cannot understand it. I cannot tolerate torture, and cruelty to animals, but strangely through Frank Cauldhame's eyes, not your normal sixteen year old teenager I hasten to add, I was allowed to enter into his own special world. I warmed to his strange ways and ideas immediately, and even felt sorry for this rather badly adjusted adolescent. I felt he was on the road to discovering himself. Unfortunately, he was also a murderer:

"That's my score to date. Three. I haven't killed anybody for years and don't intend to ever again. It was just a stage I was going through."

Well that's comforting to hear, don't you agree?

So considering Frank's background, how can you possibly blame him for the way he turned out? He lives on

a small island outside the remote Scottish village of Porteneil with his father Angus (known to everyone as his uncle), who is decidedly odd, but highly intelligent, has a measurement fetish and puts tags on all the furniture and throughout the house. He takes a sly delight in thrusting unanswerable questions at his son but then he has personally taken over Frank's education (Angus, a Doctor of Chemistry, who worked in the university for a few years after he graduated and now receives royalties for a patent) and lies dreadfully. Frank soon picked up on this and began going to the local library in Porteneil to check what his father was telling him was actually true.

Then we have the manic telephone calls from Frank's highly intelligent but also regrettably insane brother Eric, who has escaped from the psychiatric hospital (admitted as he had a partiality for burning dogs) and is heading home. He wants to give his father a surprise and Frank knows that he will make it even though the police are out looking for him. Eric appears to be more insane than ever and so although he wants to see his brother, Frank is rather disturbed about the idea.

Our "hero" is also a loner but he still wishes to be accepted into the local community. His only friend is a dwarf called Jamie. Nevertheless Frank hasn't had it easy in his relatively short life. Firstly, he has a physical problem, due to a rather unfortunate accident with a dog that happened when he was three. This is also a teenager who feels too fat, he wants:

"...to look dark and menacing... the way I might have looked if I hadn't had my little accident. Looking at me, you'd never guess I'd killed three people. It isn't fair".

My eyes lit up at this. Now what's going on here?

When one of the three murders is committed by Frank, you can see his deductive reasoning there. But the author's idea of putting an adder in a child's prosthesis left me spell-bound and I actually laughed to my shame.

And secondly, he doesn't legally exist as his father never bothered getting around to registering his birth. So Frank has to pretend that he actually doesn't live with his father, is an orphan and just visits from time to time. Also, he has to ensure that he's never around when Diggs the local policeman calls. He's found to be strange by the locals as his brother Eric went crazy and they wonder whether he will follow in the same direction.

Frank is very intelligent, a thinker and a dreamer but also a plotter. He often thinks of death and how this came about with his relatives. Leviticus Cauldhame, his uncle, had emigrated to South Africa, and he came to a very sticky, unfortunate end "when a crazed homicidal black threw himself, unconscious (How could that be? Admittedly he was at the police headquarters in Johannesburg) from the top storey" and fatally injured his uncle who was passing. His last words in hospital were:

"My God, the buggers've learned to fly..."

Admittedly Frank does some bizarre things. Well, he's a teenager, a hunter, and a murderer amongst other things and he seems to be living in a continual state of war or preparation for war. There's the Bunker, Frank's love of slings and catapults, "The Black Destroyer" catapult being his favourite; bombs, an air rifle, killing whatever comes in his way. The wasps though and the Wasp Factory; now I found this section fascinating and what a tour de force. This is the central part of the book and actually the most puzzling as basically apart from being religious in content, it also involves choice. And the different choices for the wasps that enter, admittedly unwillingly into the Wasp Factory, go through some incredible experiences. It

took me a while to fathom that out.

As for the Rabbit Grounds, well that's excellent even though it's gruesome. Frank sees a buck, but this isn't your normal every day buck, no this is an avenging rabbit, determined to perhaps kill Frank. Frank is genuinely frightened but... Well this has to be read. The boy's regret was that his Black Destroyer catapult had been destroyed by this renegade rabbit.

Even though there's violence and cruelty in the book that I abhor, I felt ensnared as the prose is both chilling and yet entralling. There are elements of secrecy and deeply unfathomable aspects that slowly come to light. For example, Angus has a study (has chemicals, does experiments) and he always locks the door. Frank is determined to gain access as he's sure there's a secret to be found there. Typical teenager though. I can recall when I was sixteen and if I wasn't allowed do something, I invariably wanted to, but that's becoming a young adult. It used to be called "growing up".

Also Frank's love of water, and making dams, then changing them. The themes of water and fire flow throughout the book. This is also a very energetic, active lad both mentally and physically.

I could also equate to Frank's liking for bombs. My elder brother Ken made a bomb when he was about fourteen and blew up the pond in our garden. It was a quiet Sunday morning in England and all hell broke loose. My father shot out of bed, threw on his clothes and shoes, and chased Ken down the road. I laughed and laughed at the time. Can you imagine the end result?

I was also intrigued with this statement by Frank:

"My greatest enemies are Women and the Sea. These things I hate. Women because they are weak and stupid and live in the shadow of men and are nothing compared to them, and the Sea because it has always frustrated me, destroying what I have built, washing away what I have left, wiping clean the marks I have made. And I'm not all that sure the Wind is blameless either".

Well that's to be understood, his mother Agnès had left him shortly after he was born; his brother Eric's mother, Mary, had bled to death in childbirth because his head was too large. Eric suffered from migraine for most of his life, and Frank used to think that the size of his head was the reason he went crazy.

The journeys through life that Angus, Frank and Eric make finally all come together in the most unexpected denouement.

In conclusion, this mind-blowing book is ghoulish, and there are unfortunate descriptions on torture and cruelty, but it must be read. It's captivating, funny in parts, tongue-in-cheek, full of black humour, philosophical; I could even empathise with the "murderer" at times, and this is such an excellent book by the late Iain Banks. A book that has to be digested in depth...

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**BlackOxford says**

**Highland Porn**

*Lord of the Flies* meets *American Psycho* on the Moray Firth. Frank, a teenage lad with no official record of

his existence, lives with his father in an isolated dune land cottage. He spends his time killing birds and other small animals. Occasionally he kills people. His principle hobby is bomb-making, at which he excels. Frank's half-brother Eric is on the run from a psych-ward. While on the lam he kills and eats dogs. Even Frank considers Eric nuts. But blood is blood, even if it's diluted and most of it has been spilled. Their father, Angus, lives in a lost world of sixties hippiedom with a basement full of decaying, and therefore dangerous, Army surplus cordite. The biker-mother, Agnes, hasn't been seen for years.

Frank is a narcissist, but he's honest about it: "*At least I admit that it's all to boost my ego, restore my pride and give me pleasure, not to save the country or uphold justice or honour the dead.*" He is also superstitious in the manner of an athlete or a soldier who believes certain ritual behaviors are necessary for success, even survival. He is exceptionally self-aware of his physical and mental states. An initially undisclosed handicap inhibits friendships, except with others equivalently deformed. In America, with the right weapons, Frank would certainly have wiped out half his high school class.

The wasp factory itself is a combination Tarot/Ouija which gives advice in a manner worthy of Poe or Lovecraft. Frank wants to know the best way to defend himself from Eric. In a family like his, tensions go deep. How these tensions get resolved can't be described as conventional. Except perhaps as conventional ghoul-porn.

Nothing edifying here, folks. Move along briskly. Three hours or so I won't get back.

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### **mark monday says**

~~a gentle coming-of-age tale set in rustic scotland, depicting the charming misadventures of a precocious lad and his idiosyncratic older brother as they struggle to understand themselves and each other.~~

this is some hard stuff, and by "hard" i mean Hard Like the Marquis de Sade Is Hard. do not read this if you cannot stomach depictions of animal torture. do not read this if you cannot stomach the murder of children. this one was hard for me to read at times, and i read some pretty terrible things.

but this is actually not a bleak book. perhaps because of the narrator: young Frank is a sadistic creature but his perspective is often self-deprecatingly wry or amusingly pedantic. he may be an affectless sociopath who channels his monstrous emotions into bizarre rituals and vicious traps, but hey - he is also a sensitively-wrought kid with many problems. what makes the book such a unique affair is the tension between the horrors illustrated and the traditional vehicle in which they are expressed: it is in many ways a kind of Young Adult novel, albeit one chock-full of grotesquerie. one in which the protagonist struggles to move beyond his outsider status, to connect with others, to understand his distant father and his, er, 'problematic' older brother. Frank's cruelties exist side-by-side with a cold-blooded version of typical teenage angst, angst that is built around familial relations, gender, and simply finding a place in the world. the ending resolves some truly dreadful plotlines in a truly dreadful manner, but also parallels the typically transformative Young Adult ending in which the hero comes to understand himself and so is able to move forward with his life. clever, Banks, very clever!

the narrative is designed as a chinese box of layered (and revolting) mysteries, but it is also designed as a more subtle trap for the unsuspecting reader: look at you, you just found some sympathy for a remorseless little psycho! the personal problems that he has to struggle with ARE pretty heavy for a kid to deal with, right? and you felt a bit of happiness at his eventual self-discovery, didn't you? well, you should be ashamed,

sicko!

the writing is clean, clear, precise and the tone is surprisingly upbeat. the protagonist's thoughts have a quiet yearning and naiveté to them that makes even his most horrific plans and rationalizations seem almost understated, almost innocent. the deadpan humor also relieves some of the viciousness of the very dark activities portrayed. the dissection of gender was fascinating! and the use of the wasp factory itself moves beyond that of a torture maze, becoming a metaphor and a parallel for the fates of each of the characters. overall, a disturbing but very enriching experience.

this is a pretty unique book. if you like it, you may want to search out jack vance's Bad Ronald, which is also dryly and ironically concerned with the deadly fantasy life of a youthful, psychotic outsider.

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## Algernon says

What if ...

... what if Holden Caulfield was born on a remote Scottish Island into a dysfunctional family, with a former anarchist for a father and a flower-power mother who ran away soon after he was born? Banks envisioned his angst teenager character as a sort of alien living on a deserted planet, a translation of one of his science-fiction ideas. The object of the study is sanity and ethics when the individual is removed from the ordinary social interactions most of us take for granted.

*I was never registered. I have no birth certificate, no National Insurance number, nothing to say I'm alive or have ever existed.*

Francis Cauldham is a monster, a sort of teenage Hannibal Lecter. He is also the narrator of this deranged fairytale, casually mentioning to the reader that he became a serial killer before his ten anniversary... . . . but he is better now: he only kills rabbits, rats, gulls and other unfortunate small critters that visit his windblown island on the East coast of Scotland. He has a hobby for making totems decorated with the skulls of his kills, for building dams out of sand and then blowing them to create floods and for burning dead wasps on altars build from dead dog skulls. His favorite toys are catapults with steel balls, improvised flamethrowers, air guns and pipe bombs that he builds in his toolshed from fertilizer and acids.

I had a hard time finding redeeming qualities in our boy Frank. I can't even call him an unreliable narrator because he is unrepentant and actually proud of his past deeds. His callousness and lack of remorse made me feel unclean reading about his actions and tainted other aspects of the story, like Frank's obvious intelligence and his dark sense of humour. The fact that I kept reading at all is due to the talent of Mr. Banks, who sneakily introduces several mysteries into what at first glance is a clear-cut case of psychopathic behaviour:

- genetic disorder : everybody in the Cauldham family seems to have some sort of psychological baggage: father a recluse with a sick sense of humour and a cellar filled with army grade plastic explosive, mother a runaway 'free-love' relic of the sixties, uncles and aunts suicidal in bizarre circumstances, older brother interned in mental hospital after setting dogs on fire and feeding worms to strange children. (view spoiler)

- a traumatic early childhood accident that left Frank with an unmentionable disability of his sexual organs
- the always locked door to his father's study
- the Wasp Factory from the title, an artefact built by Frank and imbued with mystical, prophetic powers.

Trying to unravel these puzzles kept me turning the pages after every impulse to throw the book out the window after yet another account of Frank's inventive ways to torture and kill the island's critters. Almost without noticing, the narrative veered into a condemnation of society as a whole and into a discussion of the 'will to power' philosophies of Nietzsche. The ending of this short novel not only gives answer to all the puzzles I mentioned above, but gives credence to the autor's claim that his aim in writing the story of Frank Cauldhame was not to shock his audience and to make a name for himself (as some critics ungraciously suggested), but to apply the visionary powers of the speculative fiction genre to a conventional novel structure. SF in the opinion of the author, as exemplified by his "Culture" series, is the tool for asking the big questions about what it means to be human and about where we are heading to as a race.

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I got carried away by the ideas I was trying to put in order about the novel, and I forgot to include my usual quota of citations to support my thesis. Here is an example of the dangers of homeschooling with a father who cannot resist making fun of the credulity of children (the same kind of jokes were played to much better effect by Bill Masterson in his excellent "Calvin and Hobbes" comic):

*For years I believed Pathos was one of the three musketeers, Fellation was one of the characters in Hamlet, Vitreous a town in China, and that the Irish peasants had to tread the peat to make Guinness.*

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Are you a schizophrenic if you are capable of self-analyzing your emotions, yet feel no impulse to mend your ways?

*Often I've thought of myself as a state; a country or, at the very least, a city. It used to seem to me that the different ways I felt sometimes about ideas, courses of action and so on were like the different political moods that countries go through. It has always seemed to me that people vote in a new government not because they actually agree with their politics but just because they want a change. Somehow they think that things will be better under a new lot. Well, people are stupid, but it all seems to have more to do with mood, caprice and atmosphere than carefully thought-out arguments. I can feel the same sort of thing going on inside my head. Sometimes the thoughts and feelings I had didn't really agree with each other, so I decided I must be lots of different people inside my brain.*

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A word of warning to teenagers who can't wait to find out about the thrills of drinking : alcohol may seriously impair you muscle coordination:

*I feel rather like one of those ancient dinosaurs so huge that they had a virtually separate brain to control their back legs. I seemed to have a separate brain for each limb, but they'd all broken diplomatic relations.*

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Revenge is a dish best not served at all, whether it is considered as an individual right or a tool of foreign relations between states:

*I think reprisals against people only distantly or circumstantially connected with those who have done others wrong are to make the people doing the avenging feel good. Like the death penalty, you want it because it makes you feel better, not because it's a deterrent or any nonsense like that.*

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The 'Übermensch' principle applied by Frank as he contemplates a flock of sheep, in a sort of Social Darwinism that he uses to justify his misogyny:

*... we made them, we moulded them from the wild, smart survivors that were their ancestors so that they would become docile, frightened, stupid, tasty wool-producers. We didn't want them to be smart, and to some extent their aggression and their intelligence went together. Of course, the rams are brighter, but even they are demeaned by the idiotic females they have to associate with and inseminate.*

*The same principle applies to chickens and cows and almost anything we've been able to get our greedy, hungry hands on for long enough. It occasionally occurs to me that something the same might have happened to women but, attractive though the theory might be, I suspect I'm wrong.*

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The same Nietzschean philosophy is applied to explain the true nature of the Wasp Factory:

*All our lives are symbols. Everything we do is part of a pattern we have at least some say in. The strong make their own patterns and influence other people's, the weak have their courses mapped out for them. The weak and the unlucky, and the stupid. The Wasp Factory is part of the pattern because it is part of life and - even more so - part of death.*

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(view spoiler)

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### **J. Kent Messum says**

I finally got around to a book that is considered a modern classic by many. Trust me, my 3-star rating was a surprise to even myself.

The Wasp Factory had been on my radar for quite some time, a highly recommended novel from a celebrated writer that I just never seemed to get started on, always jockeying for position in my mile-high TBR pile. I'm often told it's a sure horse to bet on, so I finally made a point of reading it, and my expectations were high.

By the end of the book those expectations weren't entirely met. Not by a long shot.

The Wasp Factory is the story of a mostly calm, collected, and vicious little teenager living on a small rural island outside a Scottish town. He lives with only his eccentric father (with which he has an odd relationship indeed) and has a older brother locked away in the nuthouse. When he's not killing/mutilating small animals or engaging in strange sadistic rituals he's conceived of, the lead character recounts his unconventional/tragic childhood and the three murders he committed in the past. Basically it boils down to the early life of a serial killer, although there is much more to it than that. The Wasp Factory deals with themes of isolation, intelligence, nature vs. nurture, insanity, violence, and the damaged minds that can result from broken homes.

For the most part I enjoyed The Wasp Factory. It's a good little story that takes you inside the alienation and thought processes of a young sociopath who does not view the world the way the rest of us do. However, I found huge potholes in the pacing that sidelined my reading of the book far too many times. Despite being an acclaimed writer, Ian Banks has a habit of writing these frequent long-winded passages overly describing some of the most painfully mundane shit (building dams, exploring the island, tinkering with all kinds of things) that prove to seriously hobble the story. There really is no need for them, like they were written merely to increase the final word-count. It's a chore to get through these pages with little to show for it, and any writing that feels like work without reward is something I take issue with. A few times the narrative felt tantamount to torture, so much fat on the prose that it barely lumbered along, highly surprising from a writer of such supposed talent. As a result, I found myself putting the book down for long periods, disinterested in returning to it.

But I did return and finish it, because at its core this novel is a little gem, though I stress it is rough around the edges (and in need of a polishing). Although I thought it was good, by the time I closed it I was quite happy to be done with The Wasp Factory. At the beginning I was sure I would love this book, but in the end I only ended up somewhat liking it. The novels I enjoy the most are those which I can't put down, and this was one I dropped more than a few times.

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### **Stephen says**

Now we all know that dating a fictional psychopath or a sociopath can be a lot of fun. While it is true that these individuals rarely make viable candidates for a long term commitment, short term relationships have been shown to have some real upside. For example, dating a psychopath can be a “breath of fresh, adventurous air” following the end of a stale, boring and unsatisfying relationship as they are much more “uninhibited” and willing to experiment than the typical person. In addition, a psychopath or a sociopath is a great choice if your goal is to get back at an overly controlling parent as they make the ideal “*I'll show them*” companion.

HOWEVER, despite the positive aspects of casually dating a fictional sociopath or psychopath, it is still important to exercise caution when deciding to court (or allow oneself to be courted by) one of these individuals as there are some very troubled individuals that it is best simply to avoid. Therefore, as a public service I have been maintaining a list of these “DO NOT TOUCH” individuals and now need to make an addition to the list.

Previously the list was comprised of the following:

1. **PATRICK BATEMAN**.....

2. **LOU FORD**.....

3. **ANTON CHIGURH**.....

4. **ANNIE WILKES**.....

5. **CLOWNS**..... They are ALL creepy, sadistic and evil and they scare the piss out of me.

6. *[This spot reserved for **THE JUDGE** from [book:Blood Meridian: Or the Evening Redness in the West/394535] .....*I haven't read it yet, but have been told by people I trust that he may actually be #1 on the list.

7. **BUFFALO BILL**.....

8. **DELBERT "THE BUTLER" GRADY**.....Seen here talking to Jack Torrance\*\*\*

\*\*\* *Jack Torrance did not make the list because Jack Nicholson, who plays him in the movie, is SO COOL that you can't choose to avoid him even if he does chop you up in the end.*

9. **THE BURGER "KING"**.....

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AND NOW, MAKING IT AN EVEN 10, THE NEWEST MEMBER TO JOIN THE "THEY MAKE STEVE SCREAM LIKE A LITTLE KID WHEN THEY LOOK AT ME" CLUB IS.....

**FRANK CAULDHAME** from *The Wasp Factory* (who joins the list near the top). Frank is a 16 year old boy living with his "not all there" father in a very secluded (thank God) Island near Scotland. Frank is a smart, imaginative, resourceful, EXTREMELY DISTURBED sociopath. Frank's entire life is about rituals and ceremonies (hence the title which is explained during the story). Frank spends his days trapping and killing animals on the island and placing their heads on "Sacrifice Poles" set up along the perimeter of his family's property. While these rituals are bizarre and gruesome, they are not arbitrary and Frank has a detailed, rigid belief system behind his actions which is both fascinating and very unsettling.

Told in the first person by Frank, this short 200 page book is RIVETING from beginning to end as Frank slowly unfolds the history of his life. In one early scene that sets the tone for the novel, Frank very casually mentions having killed 3 children during his young life but doesn't plan on killing any more saying, "it was just a phase I was going through."

While Frank is detailing the history of his childhood another plot line involves the escape of Frank's brother, Eric (another disturbed individual), from a mental hospital in Glasgow. During the course of the novel, Eric is slowly making his way back home for a "family" reunion while trying to evade the authorities.

I don't think you need to know much more except that this is an absolutely amazing study of a disturbed mind and, for me, ranks up there with American Psycho and The Killer Inside Me as a true "crawl under your skin" classic. The writing is excellent, the characterization is as good as it gets and the plot is captivating. 5.0 stars and my HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION!!!

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### **Jaidee says**

3 " I completely get if you rated it 1, 2, 3, 4 or even 5" stars !!!

For the first time ever (in the history of my reading life) I would understand completely any rating for this book. I thought long and hard and for me it was a strong three star that could have been a four star but wasn't for a number of factors.

First of all the writing is terrific. Vivid and robust and hyper-masculine prose with dialogue and thought patterns that zing and sing. I was able to see in my mind's eye what was occurring in the exterior landscape as well as in the protagonist's consciousness. The material was fairly original and very clever. The protagonist has been described as a teenage psychopath which I think is too simplistic and I think this is a very accurate portrayal of teenager who because of trauma, isolation and benign neglect has developed a very complex schizotypal personality disorder whereas his brother has a very severe case of paranoid schizophrenia.

Whoa Jaidee, you make this sound like a four star read at least. Why the three ?

Well for a number of reasons

1. there is just too much animal cruelty...at times it appears gratuitous rather than allegorical
2. the last ten percent was a complete and ridiculous sell out to me with a dumb and I mean dumb shocker as well as the last few pages were a very limp psychological explanation of why the protagonist behaved as he did
3. I cannot believe reason two happened....really I can't and in some ways makes me want to give the book 2 stars but

I know this would be completely unfair and so I am going to stick to 3 strong stars.

I am very glad I read this book for the vivid brilliance but also am very sore at the author for the ending which was just oh so lame !!

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## Richard Derus says

Rating: 4.95\* of five

**The Publisher Says:** Frank--no ordinary sixteen-year-old--lives with his father outside a remote Scottish village. Their life is, to say the least, unconventional. Frank's mother abandoned them years ago: his elder brother Eric is confined to a psychiatric hospital; & his father measures out his eccentricities on an imperial scale. Frank has turned to strange acts of violence to vent his frustrations. In the bizarre daily rituals there is some solace. But when news comes of Eric's escape from the hospital Frank has to prepare the ground for his brother's inevitable return--an event that explodes the mysteries of the past & changes Frank utterly.

**My Review:** Much has been said in disgust and even anger about this polarizing book. Some have called for it to be banned. Others have written the equivalent of a silent finger-down-the-throat mime.

You are all entitled to your opinion. Here is mine: This book is brilliant. It will be remembered long long after the pleasant entertainments of the day are more forgotten than Restoration drama. (Hands up anyone who knows who Colley Cibber is. And don't front. Or use Wikipedia.)

I'm also an ardent partisan of *Lolita*, that deeply disturbing and very beautiful book by a pedophile about his pursuit of the perfect lover. I loved *Mrs. Dalloway*, the chilling, near-perfect narrative of a wealthy woman's desperation and crushing ennui.

So here's the deal: Frank, and his brother Eric, aren't role models, aren't people you'd want to be around, aren't amusing compadres for a jaunt along the path to the Banal Canal. They are, like Hum and Lo and Clarissa and Septimus, avatars (in the pre-Internet sense) of the raw, bleeding, agonized (unangled, in this use) purposelessness of life. They are the proof that salvation is a cruel ruse. These characters rip your fears from the base of your brain and move them, puppetlike, eerily masterful withal, into your worst nightmares.

And all without resorting to the supernatural.

Humanity comes off badly in this book. The truth of what made Frank the person he is will leave you more chilled than any silly evocation of a devil in a religious text. Frank's very being is an ambulatory evil act. But the reason for it, the motivating factor, is the absolute worst horror this book contains. All the animal-torture stuff is unpleasant, I agree. It's not as though it's lovingly and lingeringly described. And it pales in comparison to Frank's *raison d'être*.

So yes, this book is strong meat. It's got deeply twisted characters enacting their damage before us, the safely removed audience. It's making a serious point about human nature. And it's doing all of that in quite beautifully wrought prose, without so much as one wasted word.

But it's essentially a warning to the reader: Don't go there. Don't do the pale, weak-kneed versions of the rage-and-hate fueled horrors inflicted on Frank, and even on Eric. Pay attention, be mindful of the many ways we as lazy moral actors condone the creation of Erics and Franks in our world.

Pay attention.

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### **Edward Lorn says**

[Let's get this out of the way right off the bat. Maggots do not eat healthy tissue. They eat dead and rotting flesh. Any medical professional knows this. This has been common knowledge since the fucking dark ages, along with using leeches to reduce swelling. Just because y

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### **Paul Bryant says**

Huh, what? Oh no – tell him I'm out. It's the guy who rang last week – no, I don't want to speak to him, no--- HI IAIN!! Great to hear from you. Yeah, yeah. How's it hanging? Yeah. So. What can we do you for today? Well yes, you told me that last week. You've written a novel, great. Oh yes, ha ha, that's what we do here, we publish books. Yes but – you know, first novels are not that easy to sell. You have to have an angle. What's that? You've got an angle? Great. Great. Listen, er ---- oh what? Your hero does what? He sacrifices animals? Yeah? Cool. Oh, and seagulls? He lives on an island – what, like Robinson Crusoe? Kind of like that? No? His what? His genitals? Eww – I think – and... oh, there's a dwarf? Yeah? Well, impotent, sacrifices animals, dwarf, yeah, that's kind of an angle I guess. The - what? They drown in what? Urine? Urine? The – you know the ad campaign is not really forming in my mind right now I gotta be honest Iain, you know what I mean, I can't see the cover... yes... yes... the brother...mentally ill... drugs... torture --- Iain, wait, wait. Stop, please, just.... Look, I'm really sorry, and all. But you know I just can't really see this as being something we would be interested in just at the ----- oh. Right. He's gone. Wow. Man, I need a drink. Listen, if Iain Banks calls up again, I'm OUT, do you hear? OUT!

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### **Timothy Urges says**

*Both sexes can do one thing specially well; women can give birth and men can kill.*

Sixteen-year-old obsessive compulsive Frank uses ritual and recreation to make his days fulfilling. Whether he is torturing bugs or killing birds, it all has purpose.

Frank's violently unstable brother Eric escapes a mental institution and decides to head home. Frank is excited to see his brother again, so he awaits his return and their reunion.

Not for the faint of heart, this book is transgressively delightful. Morality is subjective. Depravity can be powerful. *The Wasp Factory* is for those that feel like aliens on the wrong world.

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### **Fabian says**

Nifty freakshow with significantly horrific tableaux to remain with you somewhat of an Eternity...

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## Brad says

I've read this too many times to give a straight up reaction review, and I feel like any significant writing I might attempt on this book would necessarily become an essay. It's too late at night for that, so maybe next time. Instead, here is what I was thinking this time through:

- I love Frank. I don't mean I love to hate him. I mean I love to love him. And I think it is one of the greatest achievements of Iain Banks' career that he makes me love Frank. I empathize with him as he maintains his Sacrifice Poles and lies in the Bomb Circle and divines the future through The Wasp Factory. I love him so much that I find it very difficult to get all righteous about his three killings.
- Which is worse? Killing your sibling? Killing your cousins? Burning a dog? Burning a flock of sheep? Experimenting on your child(ren)? Blowing up a colony of rabbits? Torturing insects? Turning an already damaged brain to mush? Is there any difference?
- I need to spend more time on the beach.
- Bone is a marvelous piece of anatomy, and skulls are downright beautiful. I would love to bequeath my bones to my children (if they want them) or a medical school rather than being buried or cremated.
- Do I spend too much time reading books?
- I would give anything for one or both of these: 1. for Banks to retell this story, right now, today, from Eric's perspective; 2. for Banks to return to the sparing style of his debut. I want short and powerful all over again.
- I am so glad they've never tried to make this into a movie.
- Water. Fire. Earth. Air. Frank is an elemental being. It's all here, and it's all important.
- I want to see some crazy European company start making Banks toys. A lifesize model of The Wasp Factory. Azad. Damage. Black River. Not to mention the action figures. The potential is amazing.
- I wish I could write like Banks. Next time I read this I am going to buy the audiobook, narrated by the author, and listen to it instead. I want to hear it with the accents intact.

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## Mark says

This is one of the most bizarre books I have ever read yet so very captivating.

The book is told from the perspective of 16yo Frank who is a member of an extremely dysfunctional family living on the outskirts of a remote Scottish village. His brother Eric is in a psych hospital, his Father is just plain weird and his Mother left when he was very young.

The story is somewhat confusing to begin with. You are told things about the people and the town and the

area as though you already know the history. It can be a struggle at times but you really need to stick it out. As the book evolves chapter by chapter the history and the reasons behind events start to unfold. The biggest mystery of all - how is Frank raised such a normal and emotionally level kid amongst a family of crazy characters.

The Wasp factory itself is an amazing insight into Frank and how he deals with his day to day life. He carries with him a lot of baggage, most of it created by his own hand. While Frank and his Father live together, Eric is held in a hospital some distance away in Glasgow, having had a breakdown while working as a doctor.

The novel culminates in an unexpected coming together of the family but it is the secrets that are revealed around this time that will shock the reader. As I said earlier no matter how hard it is to get through the earlier "unknown" era make sure you hold out for the end.

I feel this is one of the weaker reviews I have written and I congratulate Iain Banks for that. The Wasp Factory has so many unexpected twists, some horror and is full of strange events that I feel I cannot speak about the plot very much at all for fear of giving away too much. In parts funny, in parts very disturbing but a tight plot to keep you guessing.

Οι γυνες εννοιούνται ως οι τελευταίες προσωπικότητες στην οικογένεια, οι οποίες διατηρούν την παραδοσιακή θέση των γυναικών στην οικογένεια.

Σ?μουελ Μπ?τλερ,  
1835-1902,?γγλος συγγραφ?ας

?να μυθιστ?ρημα αμφιλεγ?μενο που προφαν?ς γενν?ει ριζικ? αντιφατικ? συναισθ?ματα και απ?ψεις μεταξ? των αναγνωστ?ν. ?να μεγαλοφυ?ς γραπτ? μια φρικιαστικ? αποτυχ?α ;

?πως πολλ? ?λλα ?ργα που ?χουν διατηρ?σει διαχρονικ? την ατομικ?τητα, το χαρ?κτηρα τους και την ικαν?τητα τους να προκαλο?ν διαμ?χες, ομο?ως και το «εργοστ?σιο σφηκ?ν» οδηγε? στο αναπ?φευκτο συμπ?ρασμα : Δεν συστ?νεται ανεπιφ?λακτα σε ?λους και ασφαλ?ς, μ?λις διαβαστε? δεν θα ξεχαστε? ποτ?. Θα επιστρ?φει να σε στοιχει?νει ξαν? και ξαν?.

Αν θ?λετε να διαβ?σετε ?να εξαιρετικ? μυθιστ?ρημα για ?να εξαιρετικ? διαταραγμ?νο εφηβικ? μυαλ? που καταδικ?στηκε στην οικογενειακ? παρ?νοια, αυτ? το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι για εσ?ς. Σ?γουρα π?ντως ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο για μ?να.

Ο συγγραφέας κατέφερε να με βλέπει στο μυαλό του ψυχολογία του πρωταγωνιστή, σε μια απλότυπη περιστροφή; Έτσι, ψυχολογίας φόρμης, μυστηρίου και αναγκαστικής συνίπειας.

Το «εργοστ?σιο σφηκ?ν» ε?ναι ?να σουρεαλιστικ? ταξ?δι που μας διηγε?ται ο ?φηβος Φρ?νκ. Ο συγγραφ?ας σε β?ζει με ανατριχιαστικ? συνοπτικ?ς διαδικασ?ες αναγνωστικ?ς τα?τισης μ?σα σε αυτ? το μυαλ? που στριμ?χνεται και κολυμπ?ει σε θ?λασσες ψυχασθ?νειας, ?πως και ολ?κληρη η οικου?γεια του.

Ε?ναι ?νας σκληρ?ς δολοφ?νος δεκαεπτ? ετ?ν, ζει με τον πατ?ρα του, μισε? τη μητ?ρα του, αγαπ?ει τον παρανο?κ? ?γκλειστο σε ?δρυμα αδελφ? του, ?χει μοναδικ? φ?λο ?ναν ν?νο και πα?ρνει οδυνηρ? μ?τρα για να προστατ?ψει το νησ? που ζει και ονομ?ζει σπ?τι του.

?ταν ο αδελφ?ς του δραπευτε?ει απο το ?δρυμα θ?λοντας να επιστρ?ψει στο σπ?τι, καταζητε?ται ως επικ?νδυνος και το εργοστ?σιο σφηκ?ν τ?θεται σε λειτουργ?α. Τ?τε, αρχ?ζει και η κ?λαση εσωτερικ?ς αναζ?τησης και αποκαλ?ψεων.

Ο Φρανκ ?ρχεται ?λο και πιο κοντ? στην ανακ?λυψη του πραγματικ? του εαυτο? ακριβ?ς ?πως ο αδελφ?ς του πλησι?ζει ?λο και πιο κοντ? στο σπ?τι τους.

Το εργοστ?σιο σφηκ?ν ε?ναι ?να καταπληκτικ? κομμ?τι λογοτεχνικ?ς δημιουργ?ας ακ?μη και σαν ιδιοφυ?ς εξ?ρτημα.

Απο μ?σα του ξεχ?νεται ?να συνονθ?λευμα συναισθημ?των και εικ?νων που συνοδε?ουν τις εμπειρ?ες των χαρακτ?ρων.

Ε?ναι μια μελ?τη του ανθρ?πινου μυαλο? που τελε? σε πλ?ρη αταξ?α.

Απ?λυτα μ?νος, αγων?ζεται να επιβι?σει απο τις εχθρικ?ς πραγματικ?τητες του κ?σμου και του εαυτο? του.

Καθ?ς βρισκ?μαστε μ?σα στο σκεπτικ? του Φρανκ - κ?τι που δεν ε?ναι ασφαλ?ς - μεταφερ?μαστε σε ?να ξ?νο και εχθρικ? περιβ?λλον αναγκασμ?νοι να αντιμετωπ?σουμε... να κατανο?σουμε.. να επιβι?σουμε..

Γνωρ?ζουμε πως ?τι σκ?φτεται ο Φρανκ ε?ναι απ?λυτα ψυχαναγκαστικ? και λανθασμ?νο, ?μως, ο τρ?πος με τον οπ?ο καταλ?γει σε αποτρ?παια συμπερ?σματα ?χει μια καθηλωτικ? συν?πεια ακολουθ?ντας ως το τ?λος τις βασικ?ς του αρχ?ς.

Οι φαντασι?σεις και η αδιαν?ητη σκληρ?τητα που καλπ?ζουν στις ερ?μους του μυαλο? και του κ?σμου του Φρανκ μας οδηγο?ν ανελ?ητα στην κορ?φωση της ιστορ?ας που ε?ναι η τεκμηριωμ?νη λογικ? του παραλ?γουν.

?να δυνατ? ?ργο που με θρα?σματα απο κομμ?τια της ψυχικ?ς κ?λασης δημιουργε? το φρικιαστικ? πορτρ?το της κακοποιημ?νης και αποξενωμ?νης νεολα?ας.

?????????????

Καλ? αν?γνωση.

?????

Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς.

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**Jeffrey Keeten says**

**”Of course, I know how small a piece of land my island is; I’m not a fool. I know the size of the planet and just how minuscule is that part of it I know. I’ve watched too much television and seen too many nature and travel programmes not to appreciate how limited my own knowledge is in terms of first-**

**hand experience of other places; but I don't want to go farther afield, I don't need to travel or see foreign climes or know different people. I know who I am and I know my limitation. I restrict my horizons for my own good reasons; fear--oh, yes, I admit it--and a need for reassurance and safety in a world which just so happened to treat me very cruelly at an age before I had any real chance of affecting it."**

Frank is sixteen years old and lives with his father on an island near a small village in Scotland. His father is eccentric, but Frank is something quite different. Before I go any further, I should mention that you should start thinking of Frank as quite mad. You can even think of him as a psychopath/sociopath or whatever term you like to use. I prefer bat shit crazy. It is not a technical term, but it tends to raise the proper red flags in people's minds.

I don't know how to put this in any kind of delicate fashion. You might take a sip of your coffee or tea that you hopefully have at your elbow because you might feel a sudden dryness of the mouth.

Frank has done something that most people never do in their lifetimes. In fact, he has done it three times.

He has killed people.

Let me qualify that, he has killed children.

He has not killed them for the standard reasons, like he needed to keep them quiet because he abused them, or that he was jealous of them, or that he hated them passionately. He didn't really need a reason.

Don't worry, you'd probably be perfectly safe quaffing down a beer with Frank or hanging out and watching TV with him because...in his own words....

**"It was just a stage I was going through."**

Frank is king of his island. He has put in his own defense perimeter against encroachment. He wages war on rabbits and wasps. He has created his own religion. He has one friend, a dwarf named Jamie, who sits on his shoulders when he is drinking beer in the local pub. He has an older brother, whom he misses and worries about. I know this is going to come as a shock, but his brother is incarcerated with the mentally ill.

Yep, it runs in the family.

His father, in his hippy anarchist days, never registered Frank with the government, so he can't even prove he is alive. If there were a crack in the earth, he'd be in it. If there were a hole in a tree, he'd be in it. If there were a place in anyone's heart for him, he'd be in it.

**If he keeps his world small enough, he becomes... a God.**

This is Iain Banks' first novel, and some refer to this as a minor masterpiece. I'm not sure about the designation of major or minor masterpiece when describing a novel. A book is either a masterpiece or not. Maybe it is a hedge because this is a fine piece of Gothic Horror. Genre fiction always makes reviewers squirm a little bit when it comes to using such expansive language as... masterpiece. This novel creates an unease in the reader, but at the same time the writing compels you to go onward and forward until you hit the

tangled web of the first twist only to extract yourself just in time to get gobsmacked by the second twist.

I purchased this book at Armchair Books in Edinburgh, Scotland. The store was jammed to the rafters with books. It was not surprising that they had a good shelf and a half of Iain Banks' novels, as they should. After all, he is Scottish born and bred. My friend Tiffany McDaniel, who recently released her brilliantly, compelling first novel *The Summer that Melted Everything*, suggested that if I needed something to read while in Scotland to pick up *The Wasp Factory*. She knows how much I love Poe and Stevenson and all those Gothic macabre elements of novels where nothing is quite as it seems and the reveals are like silent screams that curl my toes and put a shiver up my spine.

Banks knows how to set the atmosphere of a novel.

**"The house was dark. I stood looking at it in the darkness, just aware of its bulk in the feeble light of a broken moon, and I thought it looked even bigger than it really was, like a stone-giant's head, a huge moonlit skull full of shapes and memories, staring out to sea and attached to a vast, powerful body buried in the rock and sand beneath, ready to shrug itself free and disinter itself on some unknowable command or cue.**

**The house stared out to sea, out to the night, and I went into it."**

Unfortunately, Iain Banks died too young at age 59, but his books will be read for generations and maybe this one will be read even longer than that.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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### **Maggie Galvin says**

Ooooh, shock me with killing things and not caring. Yes, I get it, the main character is nuts. Ok, the main character does horrible things. Sure, beat me over the head with this same set of ideas for another 190 pages. I'm sure it will be worth it in the end, right?

I read the news every day so I was not the least bit surprised anyone could think like this. The weak plot just pissed me off without enlightening me with a new perspective on the issue or entertaining me. The thing that did shock me was that anyone would write an entire book about this crap, and write it so poorly and without any kind of point, other than "Hey, this kid is CRAZY!" I skipped through the rabbit part when I saw what was coming, and after days of forcing myself to continue reading through the disjointed narrative I finally broke down and skimmed through to the end "twist" everyone talks about. Frankly, I was left saying out loud, "Who the fuck cares?" Dude, I live near San Francisco. Everyone here has gender issues. Big freakin deal. All that garbage for such an insignificant and pointless payout. Sigh.

If you like reading things purely for the sake of shock value or just to be able to say you read it, go ahead and read this. And then go get therapy. Otherwise, skip it.

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**Kevin Kelsey says**

What a story this was. Very competently written. There were moments where it felt like my heart was going to beat out of my chest, it was so unnerving, and others where it was surprisingly funny for something so macabre.

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