The Crow Road, Iain Banks

1 It was the day my grandmother exploded.
This has been said to be one of the catchiest of opening sentences. Why?

2 Throughout the story, the narrative jumps constantly from one time and place to another. Do you find this unsettling, confusing or do you feel it adds an interesting and exciting dimension?

One reviewer said,

It lends a strangely abstract quality to something supposedly conventional.

Do you agree?

3 He’s away the Crow Road is said to mean He’s died. Several deaths occur in the book but were these the most significant events? Is the title appropriate?

4 p 486 Prentice refers to my own stupidity, my hesitation, my indecision, my negligence. Is this an accurate/fair description of his actions during the story?

5 Who did you find the most attractive/likeable character? Why?

6 ...the most unlikeable?

7 There are many descriptions of Argyll and Glasgow – most of them factual. Does this add interest to the book? Is a book more fascinating if you recognise the location?

8 One reviewer said that

First time around, I hadn’t really noticed the bizarre structure to the book; early on, the chronological mesh is rather daring, risking losing the unwary reader completely. The main narrative force, where Prentice attempts to solve the mystery of his uncle’s fate, only really builds up late on in the book.

Do you agree?

9 I thought of Ashley, on the other side of the ocean, and wondered what she was doing right now, and hoped that she was well, and happy, and maybe thinking of me, and then I just stood there, grinning like a fool, and took a deep, deep breath of that sharp, smoke-scented air and raised my arms to the open sky, and said “Ha!”

Is this a satisfactory ending?

10 So does it stand up to the test of time? Yes – it has matured nicely in the 25 years since it was brought into the world, and is worthy of being savoured like the many fine whiskies that appear in its pages. Do you agree with this reviewer?