

# The Banksoniain #1

## An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

February 2004

### Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of a new Iain (M) Banks fanzine. **The Banksoniain** aims to cover the whole of his many and varied works, past, present and future. Issue #1, is somewhat of a *Raw Spirit* Special, being Iain's latest work we look at the evolution of the book, its publicity, reviews, radio abridgement, cover and anything else we could find out. We also look back twenty years to the original publication of *The Wasp Factory*, and examine how from the original controversy it is now a set book in schools. The rest is split into a number of sections that are planned to be regular columns, briefly explained here:

**Media Scanner** – a review of the recent publicity that Iain has garnered.

**Banks Obscura** – a delve into his minor works, and little known facts about Iain.

**The Unwritten Banks** – a look at the various adaptations of Iain's works, on the stage, radio, television and film.

**Banks in Translation** – an examination of at the non English editions of Banks's work. This issue has a Russian flavour.

**eBay Watch** – a commentary of Banksian items of interest that have recently sold on the Internet.

**Not "THE" Iain Banks** – a profile of a different Iain Banks. This issue – Iain Banks archaeologist.

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### Contact Us:

If you have any comments or contributions to make then please email us at: [banksoniain@gmail.com](mailto:banksoniain@gmail.com) We hope to have a letter section in issue #2. So drop us a line letting us know what you want to read about, or any questions you may have. You may win a prize.

### Brief Introduction

If you are reading an Iain Banks fanzine then you should probably have heard of him, but just in case you haven't (or if you do but need reminding) here is a brief introduction to the man and his works. Iain Banks achieved instant notoriety in 1984 with his first published novel, *The Wasp Factory*, which, being published by Macmillan, a respectable publisher, and subsequently shocked some high minded literary reviewers. Since then Iain has published another 19 books, working through a wide variety of mainstream genres, e.g. Family Saga/Whodunit (*The Crow Road*); Polemical Thriller (*Dead Air*); and Rock Novel (*Espedair Street*), as well as coming out of the closet as a Sci-Fi writer. Iain had wanted to be a writer for as long as he could remember, and points to documentary evidence of this in the form of a drawing book from his Primary 7 class that contains the results of an assignment he was given to draw what he wanted to be when he grew up. Struggling to draw 'a writer' Iain drew an actor and wrote "and writer" in the corner. Iain estimates that he wrote about a million words over fourteen years before he was published, and was not, therefore, the overnight success some people thought he was. Three of these five novels have subsequently seen the light of day as part of his Sci-Fi output after being revised, but the two earliest: *The Hungarian Lift-Jet* and *The Tashkent Rambler*, Iain does not consider worthy of any attempt to rework. **The Banksoniain** will cover all this and more, so, Welcome, as the 1997 South Bank Show profile of him put it: to the Strange Worlds of Iain Banks.

## Media Scanner

The publication of *Raw Spirit* saw a burst of publicity, which is explicitly dealt with on page #4, some other interesting snippets are summarised below.

There isn't that much published critical appraisal of Iain's work, so a welcome addition was the September 2003 publication of a book from the **Science Fiction Foundation** called *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod* (ISBN: 0903007037). Obviously geared towards the work of Iain's old school-friend it contains an essay about them both by Dr James Brown called "Not Losing the Plot: Ken MacLeod and Iain M. Banks".

Details from:

<http://www.sf-foundation.org/pubs.html>

A **Sunday Times Magazine** feature (16/10/03) explained that he carries an A4 sheet that lists all his CDs in his wallet so that he does not accidentally buy the same one twice. It is printed very small and organised both alphabetically and by genre. It also revealed how he still thinks about the game Civilization III, 18 months after deleting it from his computer, and destroying the disk, in order to stop getting up at 4am to play it.

In an interview with Susan Mansfield in **The Scotsman** (12/11/03) Iain admitted to getting scared on the extreme rides found in fairgrounds nowadays, preferring the dodgems "where there's a wee sliver of theoretical control".

The **Daily Record** (13/11/03) an article about making money out of hiring your home to filmmakers included an interview with the owner of a house used in *Complicity*.

**Scotland on Sunday** (16/11/03) related the story of a student who did not believe the author of *The Wasp Factory* and *Complicity* had no dark secrets. Querying Banks about his youth at a book launch he was sent to see Iain's mother who was also

in attendance and was told "Iain was always a very happy wee boy."

The First Minister of the Scottish Parliament, Jack McConnell, chose *Dead Air* as his book of the year in a survey of prominent Scots published in the **Herald** (29/11/03). It looks like the canny politician had waited for the paperback edition to be published before reading it.

In the **Daily Telegraph** (01/12/03) Iain explained to William Leith that to have a fun life it should be "in a tactical sense interesting, but in a strategic sense boring". He also admitted to having a really bad pun habit when younger.

A short profile of Iain appeared in the first (December 2003) issue of a new magazine called **Ink**, the "UK's first lifestyle book title", where he divulged that *Complicity* has a happy ending - although not at the end and not for itself, for *The Bridge*.

Iain has made the long list for the 2004 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Nominations come from libraries in major cities throughout the world, with *Dead Air* one of the choices of the London libraries. The shortlist will be announced on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2004.

Iain has been nominated, this time personally, in the 2004 Icons of Scotland poll run by **Scotland Magazine**. In the writers section he is up against James Buchan, Janice Galloway, Michael Fry and Val McDermid. The Jan/Feb 2004 issue (#12) of the magazine also included an interview conducted by Paul Schoonenberg in which Iain claims to have been mistaken for both Irvine Welsh and Ian Rankin.

Iain has been a long time member of the Scotch Malt Whisky Society. However, according to the **Sunday Herald** (08/02/04) he recently withdrew his membership in protest at the Society being taken over by the Whisky company Glenmorangie and therefore having its independence compromised.

## Raw Spirit

Right at the beginning of 2003 a short reference to a new book by Iain Banks appeared in the **Daily Telegraph** (05/01/2003). In a preview of the publishing year, David Robson, included the rather cryptic entry "Iain Banks (Malt, November, Century), travelling around Scotland". This caused Banks watchers some confusion: Century is owned by Random House, Iain is contracted for his fiction to Time Warner, and surely his next book was meant to be a Sci-Fi one. Early in the Summer, **Amazon** listed a new Iain Banks book called *Raw Spirit* with a publication date of November 6th, presumably Malt had just been a working title.

In August at his usual appearance at the Edinburgh Book Festival (21/08/03) came final confirmation straight from the horse's mouth, with Iain waxing lyrical about how he came to write the book. From the offer, which was one of the few that his agent even bothered to put to him, to how the initial idea that he would be driven around the Highlands in a black cab with a garrulous Glaswegian taxi driver changed into the reality of Iain travelling with friends to research the book. He also read an extract from it about the rain in Glenfinnan.

So what is *Raw Spirit*? In whisky terms it is the product of the barley distillation process that is put into casks to mature. Only after three years in a cask can it legally be called whisky. In literary terms, it is a non-fiction book by Iain Banks, but how to categorise it? The **Amazon** listing says "Category(ies): Fiction, Food & Drink, Travel & Holiday", an interesting, if incorrect mix, **Publishing News** put the subject matter dryly as "Travel Writing, Alcoholic Beverages". The **Independent on Sunday** (23/11/03) included it in a Christmas round up of 'best books for cooks', but then described it as a "beautifully realised fusion of travelogue, social commentary and drinking guide" in

which "Scotland's most famous export is decanted into full-bodied, humorous prose". The reviewer in **Esquire** entered into this debate, describing it as "an engaging piece of work, part love letter, part memoir". One of the shortest, and also most apposite descriptions was "whisky travelogue" from Graeme Virtue's **Sunday Herald** (28/12/03) article. Iain's publishers, who should probably have the last say, just call it plain "Travel Writing" on their website.

Iain has said that he regards the book as a spoiler for potential biographers, and claims it is the closest that he will come to ever writing an autobiography, and in parts it is a very personal work. In other parts he uses it to try and set the record straight about a variety of issues; from how the different names for his different types of book came about, to his continuing denial that *The Wasp Factory* is any way at all autobiographical. He also reveals snippets of background information about his works of fiction – references for which are listed in the short index on p #5. Buy it if you want to find out about all those stories.

From Iain's other comments there is little prospect of another non-fiction book as he thinks there is no way he will find a subject that he will enjoy researching as much as whisky, although he has joked that he would happily cover the opening of the first space hotel, or possibly condescend write "A year with a NEW Ferrari". As some of the reviewers noted (see p #5) whisky does not actually feature that heavily in some sections. Iain's perspective on this is that "whisky was the excuse" for the book and he did usually get back on the subject.

The paperback edition of *Raw Spirit* is currently planned for publication in September 2004, and will give Iain a chance to correct a few of the errors that slipped into the hardback. "I've no idea where I got the idea that Crieff only had one 'f'", he admitted to Graeme Virtue.

## Raw Spirit Publicity

There only seem to have been two public events to publicise *Raw Spirit*. A signing was held at the Borders on Buchanan Street in Glasgow (08/11/03), and a talk, tasting and signing that took place in Edinburgh (10/11/03). This was reviewed in the next day's **Evening News** that concluded "he had the audience eating, or perhaps drinking, out of his hand".

Iain also made a couple of radio appearances, firstly on the BBC Radio 4 travel programme **Excess Baggage** (08/11/03) where Iain, host Sandi Toskvig and Welsh writer Byron Rogers discussed the guests' recent books and "celticness", and then on the BBC Radio Scotland book programme **Cover Stories** (18/11/03). The latter was somewhat of a disappointment being a fairly short segment covering Iain tasting a few whiskies in the cellar of the Whisky Shop on the Royal Mile with Stewart Smith, coupled with two short extracts from the book. **Cover Stories** is hosted by the ex Bishop of Edinburgh (Richard Holloway) and there was a great potential for he and Iain to lock horns on the issue of religion.

There was also coverage in the printed press for the book. Even before its official publication according to the **Mail on Sunday** (05/10/03) it was on the long list of ten books that judges will whittle down to five before inviting people to vote in the travel category of the WH Smith People's Choice Book Awards. Iain wrote in **The Observer** (09/11/03) about his favourite table at the Albert Hotel in North Queensferry, and a list of his ten favourite whiskies appeared with his tasting notes in **The Independent** (08/12/03). In a **Highland News** (15/11/03) interview with Donald Fraser, Iain claimed not to be a connoisseur, but a "well informed lay person".

The publishers used the promotional slogan "One man. One hundred distilleries. No contest" on their website, and also in a

poster campaign that featured a version of the cover photograph blurred to look as if Iain was driving past at great speed these were used on the London Underground and at Scottish National Rail stations. If you send in a letter or other contribution it is a *Raw Spirit* poster that you can win!

All this promotional service that Iain has done in bringing the joys of whisky to a new audience saw him gain a nomination in **Whisky Magazine's** Icons of Whisky Poll for "Personality of the Year". The last time that Banks mixed whisky and awards he won the Glenfiddich sponsored 1999 Spirit of Scotland - Literature award.

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## R4 - Book of the Week

A month after its publication *Raw Spirit* was the BBC Radio 4 Book of the Week from 8<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> December. This saw the work abridged by Laurence Wareing into five 15-minute episodes that were produced by David Jackson Young and read by Jimmy Chisholm. The recent fashion on **Book of the Week** has been for the author of the chosen work to read it, and it was a little disappointing not to hear the excited tones of Iain read the book himself. The BBC publicity described the book as an "entertaining and opinionated account of a tour around the whisky distilleries of his native Scotland". James Rampton writing in **The Independent** (06/12/03) picked the serialisation as one of his radio highlights for that coming week.

Jimmy Chisholm is a Scottish actor, and has therefore appeared in the soap *Take the High Road*, as well as the films *Braveheart* and *Mrs Brown*. He played Wamba (the hero's squire) in the BBC's 1997 adaptation of *Ivanhoe* and has been a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company. He recently gained rave reviews in a one-man show about Charles Dickens called *The Haunted Man* that was written by John Clifford and directed by Ian Grieve.

## Raw Spirit Reviews

A quick tour round some of the comments reviewers made about *Raw Spirit*.

Rosemary Goring conjured up a beguiling image with her description of the book as “a blend of *Three Men in a Boat*, Bill Bryson, and Keir Hardie, with a smattering of *Wind in the Willows*” in the **Herald** (01/11/03). She did, however, bemoan the lack of any maps to accompany the book, and comment that the idea “one of the most clichéd in terms of Scottish publishing”. One of the writers Rosemary mentioned, Tom Morton, used his diary in the **Sunday Herald** (07/12/03) to point out how similar Iain’s book is to his own 1992 tome *Spirit of Adventure: A Journey Beyond The Whisky Trails* (ISBN 1851584986), and suggested that while he was not litigious, his publisher may be.

The **Sunday Telegraph** writer Tom Fort in his review (16/11/03) praised Iain for his enthusiasm, but thought that all his effort in visiting the distilleries could have resulted in more about whisky and its makers. He also commented that Iain suffered from the “usual problem” of food and drink writers, “translating taste into text”, and turns one of Iain comments about novel writing back on the author by agreeing “You rarely need that many adjectives, Iain”.

In his review for **The Guardian** (06/12/03) David Horspool called Banks “a genial guide”, and complemented his travel writing, but felt that there were “too many disquisitions, that seem less like elegant digressions than diversionary tactics”.

Paul Carbray in the **Montreal Gazette** (24/01/04) was consistently negative commenting that in a book “that purports to be about single malt whisky, there’s little light shed on the subject”. Whilst the reviewer in **Time Out** took a different view - describing it as “very readable”, and “hugely informative”.

## Raw Spirit Index

One of the things that is missing from *Raw Spirit*, along with a map, is an index so that after a first reading the reader can easily return to stories of interest. Here is a short one which lists where his own books are mentioned in the UK hardback.

### *Canal Dreams*

- Edinburgh launch, 43

### *Complicity*

- capsicains, 74
- chill-filtering whisky, 103
- ending for *The Bridge*, 292
- film location 121

### *Consider Phlebas*

- paperback, 36

### *Dead Air*

- aircraft security, 331
- film script, 289
- research for, 304

### *Espedair Street*

- film script, 289
- soundtrack album, 296

### *Excession*

- game based on, 183-184

### *The Bridge*

- ending, 292
- film script, 289
- Gary Lloyd CD version, 295
- input of James Hale, 250
- invitation to Bonar Bridge, 244
- steam trains, 348

### *The Crow Road*

- geography of Jura, 69
- TV adaptation, 21
- TV producer, 304

### *The Player of Games*

- dedication, 188-190
- fire-planet inspiration, 258

### *The Wasp Factory*

- author name, 249-259
- not autobiographical, 43-44
- off the slush pile, 250-251
- paperback, 36

### *Whit*

- Indo-Gale fusion cooking, 267

## Banks in Translation

**Russian Editions.** Iain has stated that he particularly likes the translations of his works that do not use the Latin alphabet just for how different they are. The Hebrew and Japanese editions fall into this category, as well as the Russian editions. So here is a quick tour of the works of

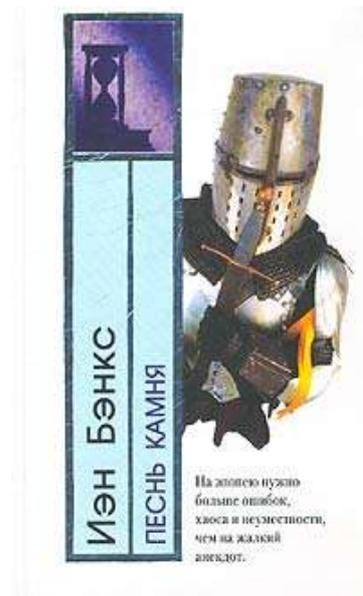
### Иэн (М.) Бэнкс.

The first Russian translation of a Banks work was the 1996 edition of *Against a Dark Background* aka По Ту Сторону Тьмы, which was re-issued in 1999 with a slightly more violent different cover. It was produced by a company called T'Sentrpoligraf and was the only “M” book available in Russian until a company called AST took up some of the Sci-Fi rights and produced translations of *Consider Phlebas* (Вспомни о Флебе), *Use of Weapons* (Выбор Оружия), *Excession* (Экссессия) and *Look to Windward* (Взгляд с Наветренной Стороны) in the last couple years.

The non Sci-Fi works have also been produced by two companies: Azbooka and Eksmo. With the former starting with *Walking on Glass* (Шаги по Стеклу), and going on to *The Wasp Factory* (Осиная Фабрика) and *The Bridge* (Мост) which contains a biography of Banks, a guide as to the pronunciation of Menzies, and copious footnotes to the book to explain the cultural (mainly musical) references to its readership. There seem to be two editions of *Осиная Фабрика*, so it could be that it was popular enough for a paperback version.

Eksmo have started with *Espedair Street* (Улица Отчаяния), *The Business* (Бизнес), *A Song of Stone* (Песнь Камня) and *Canal Dreams* (Канал Грез) and are listed by the Marsh Agency, who deal with the foreign rights for most of Iain's work, as the rights holders for *The Crow Road*, *Complicity*, *Whit* and *Dead Air*. Our Russian readers look as if they may be well catered for in the next few years as these books begin to hit the shelves.

Песнь Камня is my favourite Russian cover – although it was set in a castle I do not remember that many knights in armour in *A Song of Stone*.



## Who's Who

Iain Banks took another step into the establishment with his inclusion in the 2004 edition of the famous reference work. His entry was reproduced in an article in **The Times** (05/01/04) that listed all the new entrants, is disappointingly short, just listing parts of his educational and career history and the titles of just four of his published works. The infamous latitude that the tome gives those it includes to list their recreations has not been utilised at all. His fellow new entrants listed “left-wing censoriousness.”, “playing piano badly”, and “laughter” amongst their hobbies. Hopefully Iain will amend his entry next year and provide some insights into his personality as, for example, when he applied to university and had to fill in a form that had a question about his interests; he just put one - Explosives. Previous establishment recognition has seen Iain listed as #16 in the “fifty Scots shaping world culture” by the **Scotsman** (08/02/03), and at #98 in the Scottish Power 100 list of the **Observer** (18/04/99).

## The Wasp Factory at 20

Iain Banks first published novel was released on a largely unsuspecting world on his thirtieth birthday, 16th February 1984. Twenty years on **The Banksoniain** looks back at its initial reception and how it is regarded now.

*The Wasp Factory* was written in the summer of 1980 when Iain was living in London, and was the first book that he ever did a proper second draft of. Much of the inspiration for the physical setting of the book comes from when Iain was working for British Steel as a non-destructive testing technician at Nigg Bay in 1976. There is now a bird sanctuary in the area, described by the RSPB as "an extensive area of mudflat, saltmarsh and wet grassland on the Cromarty Firth". Iain also credits the area further up the coast at Portmahomack where he was living then.

To some extent it was a sell-out after failing with four Science Fiction novels he had attempted to get published, Iain decided to try his hand at a more mainstream genre on the grounds that he could send the work to more publishers. This manuscript had been rejected by six or so before arriving at Macmillan, and there eventually being handed to James Hale after passing through the crime department, perhaps, Iain thinks, because a policeman appears on the first page.

By this time it was March 1983, and Iain was less than a year from his self imposed deadline of making it or returning to Scotland. James Hale read what he described as a tatty manuscript on a Sunday morning (with a hangover), and the next day telephoned Iain to arrange a meeting. This, so the story goes, was not the simplest of matters. Mr Hale (like many others) was slightly apprehensive about what sort of person might have written the book. Iain at this time was working as a costs clerk for a firm of lawyers, and when the switchboard operator answered the phone stating the company name, James put his receiver

down. When communication was established a lunch was arranged where Iain's first question was whether anybody had to approve James's decision, and after being told no, he relaxed and had signed a deal by Wednesday.

It came to be published on Iain's thirtieth through the interaction of a number of factors. In 1984 Iain's birthday was on a Thursday, and in those days all books were published on Thursdays. This apparently had something to do with getting reviews into the Sunday papers. After Iain's submission there was presumably some editing time and the proofs had been produced by September 1983. By this time it was looking like being published in the first quarter of 1984 and so Iain suggested his birthday – the date Iain had told himself he should make it by.

Initial reviews were mixed, to some extent reflecting one of the reader's reports from Gollancz (a publisher that had rejected the book) that Iain was told about years later which read "Quite well written, but far too weird to be published". Many of the reviews whatever their thrust - good, bad or indifferent - were quoted in the Futura paperback edition.

One of the most outraged was that in **The Times** (16/02/84) reproduced below.

### Hype the good hype

#### The Wasp Factory By Iain Banks

(Macmillan, £7.95)

As a piece of writing *The Wasp Factory* soars to the level of mediocrity, which may explain

why Macmillan have become excited about it: most of the first novels which publishers are sent are so utterly unfit to be printed that in the end a competently executed work, in which an author has followed through an idea, however poor, with care and conviction, begins to look like a masterpiece, and can without blushing be called "a novel of extraordinary originality, imagination and comic ferocity". Or maybe the crassly explicit language, and the obscenity of the plot, which revolves about the supposed castration of a small child, were thought to strike an agreeably avant-garde note.

Perhaps it is all a joke, meant to fool literary London, terrified of seeming prudish, into respect for rubbish.

**Andrew Gimson**

FOYLES ART GALLERY  
**ANDREA  
COGGINS**  
AN EXHIBITION OF  
**RAINBOW  
QUILTS**  
10-6 daily until 14 March  
113-119 Charing Cross Road  
London, WC2

The name of the reviewer, Andrew Gimson, was not unknown to the rejection

pile at Macmillan, and when the fact that his day job was at Conservative Central Office was revealed to Iain he pronounced himself happy that he was upsetting Tories. Mr Gimson eventually had a novel published in 1991, *Desired Effect*, (Chapmans) which does not seem to have which set the publishing world alight, or spawned any further demand. **The Times** gave *Walking on Glass* a more positive review the following year, with Hugh Barnes (07/03/85) admitting that “The Wasp Factory, was greeted with suspicion by some reviewers (nowhere more so than on these pages). Perhaps they mistook its obtrusive arrangement of devices for indecorousness that made them uneasy”.

Iain has subsequently commented that some hard bitten horror readers have come up to him and complained that after reading the reviews, and then the book they spent their time waiting for something particularly nasty to happen and were ultimately disappointed.

Since its original publication the book has been translated into twenty or so different languages including Russian, Hebrew, Japanese (which Iain likes for their non Latin alphabets) with many different cover designs - the Finnish edition had a burning dog on the cover, whilst the French and Americans went, somewhat uninspiringly for wasps. The UK (Futura) paperback had its distinctive black and white cover, a theme that was continued in all Iain’s UK paperbacks until *Dead Air*. The cover of which disappointed many long-time fans.

*The Wasp Factory* has been performed on the professional stage, in an adaptation by Malcolm Sutherland that went through some evolution in terms of presentation, including the number of actors used to play the lead role, before it transferred to London after originally being performed in Glasgow and then in Leeds. The Rotterdam based Ro Theatre has staged productions of *De Wespenfabriek* around The Netherlands and also in Germany. It has been abridged and read on BBC Radio 4 in the what was then the Late Book slot, and it may (or may not) have been made

into a film - the long, complex and frustratingly incomplete story of which is covered in its own special article on p #9.

The book is now taught on a exam board English syllabuses. The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance has used it as a set book for a number of years, and their 2001 report states that in one section of the exam although two other books were available to choose to illustrate the student’s responses “only answers on *The Wasp Factory* were received”.

Iain has allowed the *Wasp Factory* name to be used by a few bands, but more successful has been the record company with the website [www.wasp-factory.com](http://www.wasp-factory.com). It was formed by Lee Chaos in order to release the second album from The Chaos Engine, and then went on to “offer its services to many kindred spirits in the UK electronica, industrial and goth scene”.

*The Wasp Factory* has come a long way in twenty years, from being described as the written equivalent of a video-nasty via stage and radio adaptations to achieving the respectability of being taught for GCE exams. The author has published another nineteen books, and although slowing shows no sign of stopping with his twentieth due this summer. He has entered the hallowed pages of **Who’s Who**, and if **The Scotsman** (17/09/03) can be believed has a baseline income of over a quarter of a million pounds per annum (100 times his original advance) putting him in their top 100 earners in Scotland list.

What does the next twenty years hold, perhaps a sequel? Iain once commented that although he did not like the idea of sequels he had thought of a plot for *The Wasp Factory 2* based around the search for Mother, and a title to go with it: *The Lost Wax Method*. Or even a film?

## The Story of the Film

The rights were sold, quite soon after publication, to Strongbow the company that produced the film 'Eat the Peach'. Iain used this money to buy a BMW. The rights were due to revert back to Iain in January 1996, but the company then holding the rights - Strongbow having been taken over twice by now - claimed to have started principal photography. This was disputed by Iain (in the Irish courts, as this was where Strongbow had been based at the time of the original agreement) and the matter was reportedly only settled (in Iain's favour) in 2002.

In the meantime, however, different sources reported that Russell Avis Productions were making the film with the director being Meiert Avis (who has directed music videos for the likes of U2, Bruce Springsteen, and the Thompson Twins). They seem to have continued production whilst the legal wrangles went on. A 1999 article in Shoot (an American publication about film production – not the British football comic) about a post production company called Miss Jones intriguingly mentions “a hallucinatory computer graphics sequence for the feature film *The Wasp Factory*, now in post-production at Windmill Lane”. Miss Jones is/was the design/animation division of a company called Windmill Lane which has links to Russell Avis Productions. It is also possible to find a few resumes (CVs) on the Internet that mention work on *The Wasp Factory* which is further evidence for actual filming to have taken place.

The first screenplay was written by Iain and the then would-be director of the film – a process that Iain did not enjoy. This was touted around for a couple of years but failed to secure any financial backing, and a new screenwriter brought in to do a version. This was done by Chris Wicking, about which Iain commented in an interview (c. 1989) that it was good “but not funny enough”. In December 1987, Iain believed that 75% of the money needed for a low budget film had been

secured. A third screenplay by Neal Purvis and Robert Wade is mentioned as being written in 1995 in the publicity material for *Die Another Day*, which they also wrote, and I believe that this was the basis for the shooting that did take place which was done with no big name actors.

Whilst the production and the legal manoeuvres went on a 1997 article in *Variety* mentioned that “London-based Renaissance Films, which remains willing to bankroll a Daldry-directed pic of Iain Banks' novel *The Wasp Factory* if the director is still interested. ‘If he wants to do it, it's there for him’ producer Stephen Evans says”. Whether they thought they owned the rights or perhaps expected the court action to be resolved quicker than it was is unclear.

There have been other rumours concerning the film. One was that Michael Stipe, of REM, tried to buy the rights off the then holder as the band wanted to do the soundtrack for the film. In one interview Iain mentioned that he was trying to get a cameo as the barman (who just has one line), and in another that the story had been relocated to Manhattan and that Jodie Foster and/or Julian Lennon had been talked of as playing the lead role.

So to summarise. It seems that Russell Avis/Windmill Lane (with Miss Jones) did make a movie (probably based on the 1995 Purvis/Wade screenplay) with unknown actors, including some late 1990s era CGI sequences. Somewhere this unseen, and possibly unfinished film is languishing.

So what does the future hold? The rights seem to be back with Iain, but will anybody pick up this controversial twenty year old novel? Iain is quoted as saying “I don't care anymore”. Perhaps the twentieth anniversary may jolt the memories of some of the filmmakers who had wanted to make it earlier in their careers.

## The Unwritten Banks

**Piece - Radio 5 - June 6<sup>th</sup> 1991**

This radio version of the short story Piece is, probably, the first adaptation of a Banks work. The story was originally published in the **Observer Magazine**, and then in the collection *The State of The Art*. The radio adaptation was by Craig Warner, and actually expands the work rather than the usual adapter's requirement of cutting sections out. Munro's letter is changed to a dictated message to 'Kid'. The original encounters with the faithful; Jack on the bus, and Mo on the train, have been extended, and augmented by a third, added by giving the girl on the plane a name (Eve), a belief in the Biblical version of creation, and dialogue which expresses that, which Munro had previously only surmised about.

### **Credits:**

Munro - Bill Paterson

Jack - Harry Jones

Mo - Bhaskar ? (undecipherable)

Eve / Voice - Susan Sheridan

Director - John York

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### **The Wasp Factory – Radio 4 – 1997**

Another adaptation by Craig Warner, this abridgement was read by Joe McFadden in the weekday "Late Book" slot in ten 15-minute parts between 24<sup>th</sup> March and 4<sup>th</sup> April. The director was Alex Burrett.

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### **Frozen Gold – Tribute Album?**

At his appearance at the 2003 Edinburgh Book Festival Iain mentioned that he and musician Gary Lloyd were trying to get a tribute album recorded of the songs they wrote for the radio version of *Espedair Street*. This is instead of the film that is looking less and less likely to be made. Iain had sold an option (1996) to Roger Gray for £1, in return for being allowed first crack at the songs. Roger wrote a screenplay that attracted interest, and was described as being in pre-production in December 2000, but never seems to have been properly green lighted.

## Banks Obscura

**041 – a poem**

*The Wasp Factory* was accepted for publication in March 1983, but was not published until February 1984. In the meantime Iain had a poem called *041* published in the 1983 edition of *New Writing Scotland*. This was the first of, a still going, series that "publishes works by writers resident in Scotland or Scots by birth or upbringing" and describes itself as "an annual volume publishing poetry and prose from both emerging and established writers".

The title of the poem is the old telephone area code for Glasgow, and the poem itself is twenty-one lines long and is about phoning a lover from a long way away.

*New Writing Scotland*, published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, ISBN: 0950262943.

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### **Chris Coco - "Next Wave"**

The radio DJ's album includes a track called *Dreaming* that sets Iain's reading of an extract from *Canal Dreams* to music. According to Chris Coco's website Iain's reading took six takes to record, and "Iain still doesn't like the sound of his own voice." Is this Iain's only official appearance on Viny?

Distinctive (2002) DISNCD78/DISNLP78

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### **Four Degrees of Iain Banks**

Iain has three honorary degrees to go with his English BA from the University of Stirling. Iain has picked up honorary doctorates from St Andrews and Napier as well as his original alma mater.

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### **Iain Banks Prize for Creative Fiction**

Gourock High School (Iain's old secondary school) has awarded the Iain Banks Prize for Creative Fiction since 1995. The first winner was Rory Beaton who received the award from Iain himself in a presentation at the school.

## James Hale

We owe Mr Hale a debt of gratitude, for his “discovery” of Iain Banks (see *The Wasp Factory* at 20, pv#7) and subsequent editing of Iain’s work, of which he was not uncritical. He completely rejected a manuscript called *O* (the one written after *Walking on Glass*) and made significant cuts in the effort after that, *The Bridge*. Iain has toyed with the idea of restoring these passages in an unabridged version, whilst admitting that James was right to reject the other work.

Iain felt so comfortable with his editor that he saw no need to have an agent until James left Macmillan, and continued to use him as a freelance editor, as did some other authors. James Hale died on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2003. *The Bridge*, a favourite of Iain’s that his editor had to work particularly hard on, is dedicated to James, as *Raw Spirit* is to his memory.

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## Not “THE” Iain Banks

This fanzine deals with Iain (Menzies) Banks the novelist, not Dr Iain (Bernard Joseph) Banks MA, PhD, MIFA, FSA Scot, the Glasgow based archaeologist and author of works such as *Nationalism and Archaeology*, and *Allanfearn Sewage Farm: An Archaeological Assessment*.

Dr Banks, who sports a beard and glasses, occasionally gets email from those who assume him to be the novelist, and he thinks that some bookshops have ordered his work believing it to be fiction when he is very much a non-fiction academic author. His doctorate, which is not an honorary like our Iain’s, concerned the rural settlement of Scotland in the first millennia AD and BC. Dr Banks reads his namesake’s novels, and even attended a signing to have his own name put on a copy of *Whit* by the book’s real author. He has also been seen helping out on the BBC TV archaeology series - *Two Men in a Trench*.

## eBay Watch

A signed copy of *New Writing Scotland* for £51.20 after ten bids, and a signed proof for *Consider Phlebas* went for £52 after six. A signed US first edition of *The Wasp Factory* sold for £46.30, whilst an unsigned UK first went for £99 attracting ten bids.

Two UK firsts of his second book, *Walking on Glass* sold recently; one for £29.99 and one for \$14.04 (c. £7.50). Some weeks there are bidders and some weeks there aren’t, although condition may, of course, have played a part in these different prices, it is very difficult to judge the condition of a book you may only have seen a photograph of. A copy of the Macmillan edition of *Walking on Glass* is worth having for the scary picture of an early 30s Iain on the inside backflap in a dark suit, white shirt and tie, trying to look like what he and/or the photographer thought a proper author should look like.

From the old to the new, and an Edinburgh book dealer sold a signed first edition of *Raw Spirit* along with a signed issue of the Scotch Malt Whisky Society’s winter 2003/4 newsletter that included an extract of the book for £36, and pre-publication signed samplers of the book have gone for between £10 - £30.

A copy of the Novacon 17 souvenir book, produced by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, a numbered limited edition of five hundred and which is the first publication of Iain’s short story *Cleaning Up*, sold for £14.99. A bargain compared to the \$150 a US book dealer wants for the copy he is advertising for sale.

Outside of books - promotional items sometimes come up for sale. A mug with decoration from the covers for *Whit* and *Excession* sold for £12.50. However, two posters from bookshops, one for *Inversions* and one for *A Song of Stone* that had been signed by Iain failed to reach the reserve prices the seller had set.

## Banks's Next Book

The perennial question for any author is - what is your next book? In a **Liverpool Post** interview (23/11/03) he stated that he enjoyed the escapism of writing about whisky but was glad to get back to Sci-Fi as "There's no fact checking to be done. I just have to make sure I'm consistent with all the silly names". Yes - Iain's next book is an 'M' one, and should be published in the summer of 2004. There is a listing on Amazon to that effect with the title *SF Novel*, and a publication date of July 30<sup>th</sup>.

Some hints as to the content of the book have reached the ultimate rumour mill that is the Internet. On his publishers website it states that although it is SF it is NOT a Culture book, giving a publication date in August. Iain has also apparently been researching gas giant planets (like Jupiter) and apparently knows more than a normal person probably should about how big planets can theoretically get before they become stars.

In a talk last August 2003 Iain mentioned that he had the central plot idea for the novel the previous November, and whilst researching and writing *Raw Spirit* he had been doing the usual plot refinement activities he does before he actually begins to write. He also said that he planned to start writing in October, and if he follows the modus operandi he has previously outlined in interviews will write in the region of 3,000 words a day, five days a week, to have a manuscript done by Christmas. He will then take time off for Hogmanay (especially so with all the whisky he has stockpiled), and then start working with his editor in the New Year to hone the book for a summer publication.

This book marks the end of Iain's current contract with Time Warner. What will his next career move will be now he is fifty, James Hale is no longer with us and Timer Warner Books was apparently put up for sale last year?

## The Big Read

The BBC recently ran a public vote to establish the British public's "best loved" book. The initial voting period in April 2003 produced a top 100, and then a further series of programmes used celebrities to advocate the top twenty one, and invite more votes eventually leading to a live final for the top 5 where *The Lord of the Rings* won. The books voted for by the public were many and varied, but none of Iain's made the top 100.

Perhaps his vote was split between his 18 novels? However, this initial theory lost credibility after the second hundred were listed on the programme's website and *The Wasp Factory* made the only appearance of a Banks work at #108.

Perhaps Iain's books whilst widely read and highly regarded just do not fit into the "best loved" category that the BBC were searching for? The list certainly contains a high proportion of children's books, and others that would have been read at school at an impressionable age, and much of the original publicity had been aimed at libraries, schools and schoolchildren.

Perhaps being a telephone and Internet based vote, the self-selecting panel of 140,000, that chose over 6,000 different books for the initial rankings just did not include Iain's readership. Such was the lack of 'Scottish' books on the list that the bookshop chain **Ottakar's**, in conjunction with the **Herald** newspaper, were prompted to run a vote exclusively for Scottish books. Iain fared well on this list, with more books (ten) in the top 100 than any other writer. Headed by Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, with *The Wasp Factory* 6<sup>th</sup> and *The Crow Road* 9<sup>th</sup>, in terms of overall votes Iain was 3<sup>rd</sup> behind Robert Louis Stevenson and Irvine Welsh.

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**The Banksoniain** is available in PDF from <http://efanzines.com>

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