

The Banksoniain #3

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

August 2004

Editorial

Apologies for being slightly later than the usual mid month publication date, but I wanted to cover Iain's appearance at the Edinburgh Book Festival which was on Friday August 20th.

As well as news of *The Algebraist* and its publicity tour, we have the low-down on the long awaited DVD of *The Crow Road*, as well as news of the US publication of *The State of the Art*, and the UK *Raw Spirit* paperback.

Book number three in the publishing history of Banks is *The Bridge*, but as nothing is simple, we get there via a truly lost work called *O*. We also have a slight detour to visit a location from *The Bridge*. The theme is continued in **The Unwritten Banks** about the CD it inspired and we have a guest reviewer.

Media Scanner and **eBaywatch** cover their topics as usual, and we have what we hope to be a new regular, **Critical Banks**, which each issue will review and discuss a critical article that examines Banks's work. This issue's **Not "THE" Iain Banks** is someone with a very long job title. **Banks Obscura** delves into a couple of dictionaries that mention Banks.

Oh yes, your editor was "unveiled" by www.trufen.net in their review of issue #2. My wife thought "almost obsessive" was a little on the generous side and I liked the "well written and readable" comment.

Thanks to Richmond for his review, as well as Jason at Night Shade Books and Chris at Second Sight Films for the information they provided, plus Matthias for the transcript of his interview. Finally, there must be a special mention of Jessica at Time Warner Books for the publicity details, and last but not least thanks to Iain M Banks himself.

Publication News

The Algebraist

The Algebraist's November 4th publication date draws ever closer. The cover design appeared on Amazon (UK) in mid June, and like his last mainstream book is a break with the past and is not by his usual SF artist Mark Salwowski. It also heralds a forthcoming back list makeover.

The cover was created by Peter Cotton the art director at Time Warner Books, and depicts a natural satellite orbiting a gas giant. A little investigation on the NASA Image Exchange website seems to suggest that it is a picture of Io in front of Jupiter taken by the Cassini-Huygens probe on January 1st 2001 that has been given the title: "A New Year for Jupiter and Io", the ID# of which is PIA02879. However, some manipulation (rotation and mirroring) is required to reproduce the actual book cover image. More details on the back.

The State of the Art - US

Night Shade Books is publishing two editions of the collection *The State of the Art* with a new cover by Les Edwards in September. A trade paperback, with all the stories augmented by the article *A Few Notes on the Culture*, and a signed, limited edition (150) with a bound in bookmark and some extra materials which look like being; *A Few Notes on Marain*, the epilogue for *Against a Dark Background* and poems *New* and *Debriefing*.

Raw Spirit - Paperback

This was published on 5th August with a cover showing a distillery in a photograph by Martin Gray. There are still no index or maps to help the reader round Scotland or the book.

Crow Road DVD

Second Sight Films Limited is bringing out a DVD edition of the BBC mini series of *The Crow Road*. Originally broadcast on BBC2 in late 1996 it was opposite another Scottish export Billy Connolly on BBC1, although it had a repeat episode as well, and taken together audience figures approached five million people per episode. It took a surprisingly long time before it was released on video in 1999, a product that was deleted just before Christmas 2003.

The TV production was a great success winning a variety of awards for the acting and writing, and so a fair amount of this glory reflected back to the original author. Thom Dibdin in **The Independent** (05/11/1996) saw this as heralding Banks's breakthrough to even wider public acclaim stating "last night Iain Banks moved from cult to living room". It was also in **The Independent's** pick of TV drama for that year (15/12/1996) whilst Gary Bushell in **The Sun** (1/1/1997) named it his second best drama of the year after *Sharpe*.

A TV-tie-in edition of the paperback was released, with the Abacus paperback gaining a slip jacket with a picture of Joe McFadden, who played Prentice in the production, along with the words "Now A Major BBC TV Series". BBC Scotland consider it such a landmark that they use it on their website as one of the ten broadcasting items that defines the 1990s in their history of Scottish broadcasting from the twenties to the end of the century.

On the DVD the most significant extra is the director (Gavin Millar) and screenwriter (Brian Elsley) providing a commentary for episode one. Second Sight have a very good reputation for the quality of their releases that range from the complete sets of the Reginald Perrin TV series to the film version of *Day of the Triffids* starring Howard Keel. In particular they are fastidious about picture quality, commissioning restoration work on a print if required, which hopefully on this eight year old production should not be the case.

The Region 2, double DVD has a planned release date of October 25th, with an RRP of £19.99.

Banks Obscura

Dictionary Corner

There are three Banks related entries in Brian Stableford's *The Dictionary of Science Fiction Places* (ISBN: 0684849585) which limits itself to locations first described in print, and most interestingly of all, cross references them with creations of a similar ilk.

The first is for **Eā**, the home world of the Empire of Azad from *The Player of Games*. It discusses the empire, its social structure, and game fixation, before the empire's fall at the hands of the Culture. The other locations "where survival and success were excessively dependent upon strategic and tactical acumen" are: Dickson's Kultis from *Tactics of Mistake*, Sheckley's prison planet, Omega, in *The Status Civilisation*, and Vernor Vinge's virtual reality Other Plane from *True Names*.

Also from the second Culture book there is an entry for **Echronedal**, the Fire Planet, which describes the reason for its nickname and adaptations its ecology has made to the conditions there. The references to similar fire ravaged places are: Abyomen from Hal Clement's *Cycle of Fire*; Ishtar from *Fire Time* by Poul Anderson and the Venusian Hotlands that Stanley Weinbaum wrote of in *Parasite Planet*. The story of Banks's inspiration for this planet is told by the man himself in *Raw Spirit*.

The story of **Schar's World** from inhabited world to a Dra'Azon Planet of the Dead watched over by Changers, through the events chronicled in *Consider Phlebas* to its complete sealing off is précised in its entry. The fictional location is then held as an example of an "Ozymandiasque monument to futility" along with the Earth based Twilight Beach of Downing's *Rynosseros*, Ballard's Ritz Hotel from *The Drowned World* and the Desert of the Dawn of John Taine's *The Time Stream*.

The 2000 *Penguin English Dictionary* (ISBN: 0140293108) includes the entry for **bucko**: noun (plural buckoes or buckos) chiefly Irish, informal (often as a form of address) a young fellow; a lad: How the hell are ye, me young bucko? - Iain Banks.

Media Scanner

The **Scottish Liberal Democrats** have taken to quoting Banks. In his conference address (28/03/04) Malcolm Bruce MP in the context of supporting integration in Europe and opposing blind following of the American way, quoted from *Raw Spirit* "Last time I checked I did have an MEP to whom I could complain about any abuses within the European system, and who I could, along with my fellow voters, remove from office: I am yet to be informed of the identity of my Congressional representative." Then in the Scottish Parliament (21/04/04) Tavish Scott MSP used exactly the same quote in a debate on enlargement of the European Union.

Brian Aldiss gave an interview to **BBCi** (13/05/04) when plugging a history of radio science fiction programme he was presenting. He was asked "Who would you rate as the best science fiction authors writing at the moment?" and responded "It would certainly have to be Iain Banks", although he then added "and I think also Stephen Baxter".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/news/cult/2004/05/13/11097.shtml>

The Scotsman reported in Simon Pia's diary column (02/06/04) that **Holyrood Magazine** in its review of celebrity voting habits said that Iain would vote for the Scottish Socialist Party in the European elections on June 10th.

News of *The Algebraist* began to appear in the specialist SF online media before the print and broadcast media took any interest. **SF Crowsnest** reported (16/06/04) Iain as describing the book to their correspondent as "Very long - a tad more than *Consider Phlebas* - fiendishly complicated, but definitely space opera of the wide-screen baroque persuasion, full of weird aliens and arguably weirder humans".

<http://www.sfcrowsnest.co.uk>

The Western Mail (26/06/04) reported on a Tesco.com conducted survey of "all time best reads on the beach". The results were split by reader's gender with males choosing Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, and females *The Riders* by Jilly Copper. Around 4000 replies were received and *The Wasp Factory* was #15 on the male list.

There was a non fiction book review by Ric Cooper in the **Daily Mail** (02/07/04) of Ken Silverstein's book *The Radioactive Boy Scout* about an American kid who set out to collect an example of every element to get his science badge and then moved on to building his own nuclear reactor when he discovered that fissionable material was readily obtainable. It prompted some scary thoughts, especially the line that said "the useful background helps convince us we're reading a true account written by a professional journalist, and not a piece of science fiction concocted by J.G. Ballard or Iain Banks.", which made me consider the question - What if Frank had nuclear material?

Ed Black's Diary column in **The Scotsman** (22/07/04) reported that Phillip Pullman was joining the Generation Science Club. This is an organisation that helps "encourage and nurture a passion for science in primary-school children" by raising money for interactive shows in schools. The article mentioned Iain Banks and Phillipa Forrester as also being involved. Iain had previously been quoted in **The Scotsman** (26/08/02) as saying on this subject "Science can be cool, but we have to get away from the stereotypical geeky image scientists have".

Unfortunately Steen Christiansen was not able to give his paper "Bridging Genres: Iain Banks" that he had planned to at the conference - A Commonwealth of Science Fiction, which was mentioned in issue #2.

The Sunday Telegraph (01/08/04) published a very short review of the *Raw Spirit* paperback. A longer review by Boyd Tonkin appeared in **The Independent** (13/08/04).

Dayle Crutchlow in a bizarre article entitled "Bees - why I just hate those stripy little buzzers" published in the **Coventry Evening Telegraph** (07/08/04) claimed to have burned his copy of *The Wasp Factory* as part of his war on things that have stripes and buzz. Perhaps he should have read it and used it as a source of ideas?

Simon Pia's **Scotsman** diary (26/08/04) mentioned Iain as being a North Queensferry glitterati heavyweight along with the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown.

eBayWatch

A couple of runs of *The Culture* fanzine hit eBay shortly after the publication of the last edition of this fanzine. A set of numbers 6 to 12 went for £5, and a full set for £21. The seller being someone not wholly unconnected with that publication. Another complete set was auctioned by a different seller and reached £12.01.

A ten cassette unabridged audio book of *Look to Windward*, that was also mentioned in *The Banksoniain* #2, sold for £21.

A copy of *Foundation* #76 attracted 5 bids and reached a price of £5.50. The Banks related content of this journal is reviewed on p #5.

Something that Iain professes to not understand is why first printings are so much sort after than subsequent ones. In one interview he commented that the second print run of *The Wasp Factory* is smaller than the first so by the laws of supply and demand they should be worth more. To a serious collector, however, it does make a difference as what they want is the earliest available publication. This is why a second printing of first edition of *The Player of Games* sold for just £4.70 despite having what looked like as immaculate a dust wrapper you can expect for a 16 year old book.

A book dealer with a copy of the Novacon 17 standalone edition of *Cleaning Up* conducted an interesting series of auctions. Describing it as a "lost book" (although between you and me it is in the collection *The State of the Art*) it was listed with a starting price of £199, which looked very high even for a signed edition. Maybe the seller placed too much faith on the fact that online dealers have copies for sale at \$150 (£80) and £125. These have been offered for quite some time without being sold for the simple fact that no one is buying at those prices. After attracting no bids the item was re-listed at £159 and, with predictably similar results, and again at £99.99. Eventually after being listed at £59 two bidders took the plunge and the item eventually sold for £62.

The first set *The Algebraist* proofs seem to have been issued in mid July, and according

to Joe Gordon's blog (*The Woolamalloo Gazette*) were restricted to around twenty. A few hit eBay later that month, and then more at the beginning of August. The first attracted 9 bids and went for £27.75, with subsequent copies going for £46, £40, £36.01, £21.10, £31.67, £29.50, £26, £21.10 & £21.50. The cover has the Jupiter/IO image (see p #1) and the tag line "The most eagerly awaited science fiction novel of the decade"

Other proof editions have recently been offered. A pair – *Look to Windward* and *The Business* were sold for £15. A signed proof of *The Crow Road* sold for £16.52

Someone sold their collection of signed Banks firsts off individually. Described as unread and pristine *Whit* went for £18, *Excession* £20, *Inversions* £21, *Look to Windward* £25 and *Complicity* for £33. These prices give an interesting indication of their comparative worth to today's collectors. Then again if you only need one to complete your collection you may pay an inflated price for it.

A sealed boxed collection of ten SF paperbacks that includes *The Player of Games*, as well as *The Star Fraction* by Ken Macleod, and books by Arthur C Clarke, Larry Niven, David Brin and others, sold for just £5, costing more than that in postage.

The Crow Road seems to be in vogue at the moment. A signed, dedicated ("To Rupe") and dated (12/04/92) edition went for £33, hopefully to another Rupert. An undedicated but still signed edition went for £42.95 and another for £39.99, whilst an unsigned first sold for £14.99.

Issue #38 of the fanzine *Critical Wave* from 1994, sold for £3. This contains the first publication of the Banks penned background article *A Few Notes on the Culture* that Ken MacLeod had posted on the Internet earlier that year.

This issue's bargain was probably the large format *A Song of Stone* paperback which sold with a still wrapped promotional t-shirt for the book for just £3.30 attracting just two bids.

A copy of the Pan paperback of *The Bridge* sold for just £0.15, well, at least it sold.

Critical Banks

Foundation #76: "Banks" Issue

Watching the bidding for a copy of this sold on eBay (see p #11) prompted me to dig out my copy and re-read the articles.

Foundation is subtitled the international review of science fiction, and is published three times a year by the Science Fiction Foundation. Issue #76 is dated Summer 1999, and four of the seven main articles are Banks related, and have extremely long titles, all of which include colons. Handily they are summarised on the back cover: Tim Middleton introduces the science fiction of Iain M Banks; Andrew Butler redoubles his scrutiny of *The Wasp Factory*; Simon Guerrier longs for the utopia of *The Culture* and William H. Hardesty looks sceptically at *Use of Weapons*.

The first article acts as an introduction and puts both strands of Banks's writing into its Scottish context before concentrating on his SF output up to and including *Inversions*.

The second part of the article was the most rewarding, and worth reading after struggling through a discussion of the how Banks is indicative of the "Caledonian anti-syzygy" – a concept that "refers to a yoking together of opposites in which both aspects remain distinct". The examination of the SF works neatly summarises the plots and themes of these works and also relates them to Banks's "mainstream" works, and also includes a couple of paragraphs about *The State of the Art*, an often ignored piece. *Against a Dark Background* is likened to *The Crow Road*, in terms of the method of writing, and the later works are compared less favourably with Banks's earlier output.

The approach that Andrew Butler takes is to use a title "Strange Case of Mr Banks: Doubles and *The Wasp Factory*" that echoes the full title of Stevenson's *Jeekyll and Hyde* novella. Dr Jeekyll, of course, experiments on himself, whilst Frank is the subject of his father's research. Butler uses the singular source of the good/evil in Stevenson's story as a lead in to examining Kev McVeigh's theory of Frank/Eric being the same person.

There is an interesting discussion of the gifts that Franks has been given by his father, the books; *The Tin Drum* and *Myra Breckinridge*. Both of these have parallels to the situation in *The Wasp Factory*, which elude Frank as he has avoided reading them. Finally more doubles are reflected on: Frank/Frances, Angus/Agnes, Paul/Saul as well as "possibly" Frank/Eric.

A response to this article has been written by Maureen Kincaid Speller which is reprinted in *Steam Engine Time* #1 which can be found at: <http://efanzines.com/SFC/> that brings into the discussion the Fisher King of Arthurian legend. She finishes by postulating on what if Frank's story as told is true, rather than the approach that many commentators take where they regard Frank as an unreliable narrator.

Simon Guerrier examines the whole of Banks's Culture output in terms of the Tom Moylan devised term "critical utopia". This concept is defined by features such as: the rejection of hierarchy, manifested by the absence of discipline, especially when compared to the adversaries encountered; the feminism, with gender rendered unimportant by the ability to, and expectation of, changing it; and the concern for ecology, as there is no such thing as rubbish. All these, it is argued, makes the Culture something that we could be and therefore the novels about it books of hope.

The final article claims there is a counter-narrative in Banks's Culture works. Agreeing with Colin Greenland's observation (made in *Foundation* #50 in a review of *Use of Weapons*) that the Culture is like the late Victorian British Empire, in its own eyes a benevolent imperialism, Hardesty identifies a critical dialogue, particularly within the most "complex and subtle" Culture book, *Use of Weapons*. The Culture novels are therefore he concludes about "the nature of ethical obligations", where one side is vastly more powerful than another.

Rather than wait for the next one to pop up on eBay, back issues are available from:

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

The other articles in this issue concern Robert Heinlein, Star Wars and *The Thing*, and there are also a good clutch of reviews.

The Bridge

The Bridge, Banks's third published novel, was not written straight after his second, *Walking on Glass*. It was not even the next book he submitted his publisher. The story of *The Bridge*, as a Banks novel begins with *O*, but the story of "the bridge" in relation to Iain Banks goes right back to his birth.

Banks's parents were living in North Queensferry when he was born, and continued to live there until he was nine. The view from young Iain's bedroom was dominated by the Forth Rail Bridge – work did not begin on the road bridge until he was four, and it wasn't opened until after the family had moved away. Banks choose a view of the rail bridge as his contribution to a book called *A Sense of Belonging to Scotland*¹ - which contains photographs of the favourite places of fifty Scottish celebrities.

O was the book that Iain wrote after *Walking on Glass*. Macmillan in the guise of James Hale turned the book down, although Mr Hale commented that other publishers would probably have picked it up just to get Banks on their books. James later cut 40,000 words from *The Bridge*, which might have lead to difficulties, but in the end Iain dedicated the book to his editor.

The truly lost book, *O*, featured a man waking up in a desert with no memory but with a circular mark on his chest. He then travels to a city where he gets involved in some political machinations. Iain commented that it had an approach that he revisited for the *A Song of Stone* in that the setting and timing were not explicitly stated, although the technology was similar to that found on mid-to-late twentieth century Earth. The amnesia and circular mark are the story elements that were recycled into *The Bridge*, and also that some shrub/tree castle descriptive passages formed the basis for a similar scene in *Feersum Endjinn*.

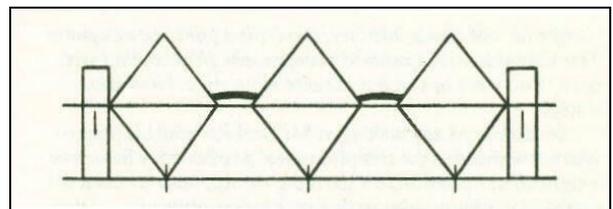
The hardback edition was published in July 1986. Reviews at the time were very favourable. The **Times** (10/07/86) through

¹ Andy Hall (2002) Mercat Press, ISBN: 1841830364
<http://www.asenseofbelonging.com/>

the pen of John Nicholson was most fulsome with its praise describing the book as "significant progress in the flowering of an exceptional talent", and saying "If it does not win at least one major literary prize I shall ask for a transfer to children's books". It didn't.

The first paperback edition of *The Bridge* was produced by Pan, a sister company to Macmillan, in 1987 with a colour cover by Mark Oldroyd. Iain was unhappy with the book that introduced a number of typographical errors, for example, the conical tower became comical. A Futura paperback edition was sanctioned in 1989, followed by the 1990 Abacus edition which was the first Banks book to have a Peter Brown black and white cover. This had been done as an exercise for his portfolio which he thought needed fleshing out, and having recently read the book he set about producing a cover for it – "simply because I liked the book so much"². His first colour effort displeased him and so he tried a black and white one, was satisfied and put it into his folder of work for his agent. The publishers saw it, liked it and asked to use it. Peter then did a paperback cover for *Espedair Street* and the mainstream hardback covers from *The Crow Road* to *The Business*.

The physical structure of the novel is like the bridge itself, drawings of which appear at various points throughout the book. Coma, Triassic, Eocene and Coda deal almost exclusively with the realistic narrative. They are 'on a level', that being the main level of the bridge. The three 'Meta' sections are more complex and contain the fantasy sections, both metaphorically and literally. These are subdivided into four subsections each that reflect the structure of the cantilever in those parts of the bridge. .



The diagram from page #56 should illuminate this point, and remember that it is accompanied by another one of a suspension

² The Culture #1, p #4 (1997)

bridge a representation of the Forth Road Bridge

The names of the Meta sections are significant. The first **Metaphormosis** leads the reader into the book by setting up the basis for the imagery, with the second **Metamorpheus** relates to the Greek god of dreaming, and finally when things are coming to a head it is all change with **Metamorphosis**. This final Meta section has its four chapters named after geological time periods, a reference to the dreamer's original subject of study at university.

The main literary structural influence is *Lanark* by Alisdair Gray, which Banks has freely acknowledged. Two differently named characters being the same person; and the part realistic - part fantastic narrative are features of both books, although Banks goes a step further with his third version of the same narrator in the Barbarian. Whether you regard *The Bridge* as homage or copy then depends on your attitude to Banks's work.

The Barbarian character adds an extra complication into the interpretation of the book, and is usually considered to be a Freudian Id construction, a pastiche of Sword & Sorcery novels, or both. These sequences are based "on scenes from *Citizen Kane*, *L'Age D'Or* and *The Butcher*"³ according to an interview Banks gave at the time of publication. In another interview Banks revealed the fact that his editor tried to get him to write a novel or series of short stories based on the character⁴.

Banks as usual plays games with his readers. The whole story is a jigsaw of sometimes compartmentalised, sometimes overlapping sections that need to be pieced together. With somebody who turns out to be dreaming fabricating dreams to tell his doctor. Other minor games include working out the name of the main character, following the chronology of his life via music and current affairs, and seeing how these are reflected back into Orr's story. Looking at the Russian edition of *The Bridge*, there are copious amount of footnotes

³ The Face #78, p #35 (October 1986)

⁴ GM Magazine vol. 2, no. 3 (November 1989)

that have been provided to explain these cultural references.

An extensive analysis is available online at <http://rpuchalsky.home.att.net/bridge/>. Rich delves deeply into the symbolism on a chapter by chapter basis and particularly seeks to link the work with Banks's later published, although mostly previously drafted, SF output. For example, the planes that periodically fly alongside the bridge with their signals in three by three grids could possibly be in Marain the language of the Culture. There is much to disagree with in his analysis, but much to stimulate thought as well, in particular, the discourse on the relevance of the direction in which Orr travels along the bridge. The bridge joins the City and the Kingdom, which are respectively Edinburgh and Fife, and Rich postulates that moving towards the different ends is indicative of whether at that point Orr is coming out of the coma or slipping further in.

The Bridge can also be thought of as being alternatively autobiographical. The main character, although five years older than the author is "fifty percent autobiographical"⁵, he admitted to Liz Radley in an interview from the year of publication, adding that "his interests are basically the same as mine, and I really enjoyed writing those parts". Twelve years later he was describing it as "what might things have been like if I'd gone for a proper career"⁶, and again at this year's Edinburgh Book Festival.

The ending of *The Bridge* is ambiguous, but probably optimistic. However, it does get wrapped up in *Complicity*, Banks's other Edinburgh based novel. In the later book there is a scene in the bar of the Café Royal where Cameron meets his friend Al, and they talk about his wife. Al is the protagonist from *The Bridge*, identifiable by the wounds he still carries from the crash, and the Andi is Andrea. Iain has admitted in interviews, and subsequently in *Raw Spirit*, that *Complicity* has a happy ending, but as he says "It is just that it isn't its own happy ending, and it's not at the end of the book"⁷.

⁵ Blitz #46, p #67 (October 1986)

⁶ The Edge #1, p #35 (1998)

⁷ *Raw Spirit*, p #292 (2003)

The Bridge has been translated into quite a few languages. A French version was produced by Denoël in 1988, followed by Danish, German and Spanish editions by the early nineties. Polish, Italian, with the title changed to *Corpo a Corpo* (in English, Body to Body), Russian, Dutch and Czech versions have subsequently been produced. The Japanese rights have been sold, and there have also been US editions.

The film rights to *The Bridge* were purchased by a company called Union Pictures. Roger Gray worked on the screenplay for Brad Adams (both names you will find mentioned in *Raw Spirit*). In August 2000 he said he was twenty pages into it and by that December described himself as “in the middle of writing the script”⁸. Union Pictures went into voluntary receivership in late 2002. They had produced other TV programmes for the BBC including the one off drama *An Ungentlemanly Act* and the series *Rockface*, before attempting a move into films that seems to have killed off the company. The rights are therefore available.

One Glasgow Mayfest there was a theatrical production of *The Bridge* about which Iain commented “I admired the courage in mounting it, but ... it didn’t work for me”⁹, also commenting in a BBC online chat that he had got lost and he had written the thing. In Matthias’s interview Banks was also asked about the difference between SF and mainstream and mentioned that there are errors of fact in *The Bridge* that he felt bad about which he doesn’t about things he gets wrong in his SF.

Banks himself consistently names it as his own favourite amongst his works, and has described it as “the intellectual of the family ... the one that went away to University and got a first”¹⁰. It is, however, something that he hopes to surpass, commenting in 1995 “I’d like to do better than that ... one day. But I’ll be happy with that for now.”⁹.

⁸ Roger Gray’s own posts to alt.fan.iain-banks.

⁹ Matthias Penzel (September 1995).

¹⁰ SFX #1 (June 1995).

The Unwritten Banks

Described by its blurb as an “audio rendition of Iain Banks’s best-selling novel. Queasy, claustrophobic soundscapes form and dissolve around a maze of dreams, as the dreamer dances with death”. Gary Lloyd plays many of the instruments on the piece, but there are also many other artists/soloists credited on the CD including a choir, a company of hand bell ringers, and Iain reading some extracts which had been chosen by Gary.

Interviewed in issue #1 of *The Culture* (1997) Gary commented that as soon as he read the contents page he saw a musical structure to the book. After that first reading he knew that he wanted to do something with it, although it was ten years before the album was released. Iain was supportive from the first approach that Gary made and recorded vocal sections in 1992, and then again in 1995, before the last twelve months saw the majority of the work done as the piece finally came together.

Main credits. Concept, Composition and Text Arrangement: Gary Lloyd. Text and Narrative Performance: Iain Banks. Produced, Engineered and Digital Editing - Jon Maidment.

CD: Codex (1996) ISBN 189959857X.

A live performance of the work took place at Telford’s Warehouse, Chester on 13th July 1998 with Iain Banks narrating and Gary Lloyd performing the music.

CD Review

By Richmond Clements

Gary Lloyd released this CD, inspired by the novel, in 1996. It has to be said, it’s a brave decision. *The Bridge* is a fearsomely complicated book, and distilling it down to just over forty-three minutes was always going to take some doing.

Somehow, Lloyd manages to do just that. Obviously, there are huge sections of the book missing, but such is the power of the production, the listener doesn’t miss them. Lloyd had selected choice passages only for his composition.

The music itself is just how you would imagine it sounding. It is a mixture of heavily industrial noise and more gentle passages. Then, with the arrival of *The Barbarian*, the soundtrack bursts into a cacophony of static and distortion, and the listener finds the Barbarians words almost lost among the accompanying noise. It's not often that the chance arrives to use a word like 'cacophony' in its proper sense, but this is one of them!

Like the book, the CD is divided into sections, from 'Coma' to 'Coda', by way of 'Metaphormosis' etc. Wisely, it ends with the same ambiguous sentence.

But what of the narrator? As can be expected, Banks delivers the lines with the complete understanding of the piece that you could only get from the author. Understanding in itself is not enough though, if the narrator is unable to emote. Thankfully, Banks has no such handicap, throwing himself as he does into the role of Lennox with some gusto. Indeed, while he is excellent in the lead role, when he takes up the mantle of the deranged Barbarian, he seems to move his performance up another gear.

The CD is beautifully produced and atmospheric throughout, making full use of all your speakers, as noises, music and choral sounds swirl around the listeners head.

Lloyd and Banks have delivered something exceptional here, and it is worth seeking this recording out. And it would be interesting to see how they would tackle some of Iain's other work. *Walking on Glass* anyone..?

Peniel Heugh

The Waterloo Monument, seems to be the most common name of the tower on Peniel Heugh which in *The Bridge* is the scene of the incident with a silk scarf. The 150 foot high structure commemorates the battle of 1815, and is located on an ancient fortified site. Unfortunately it is not open to the public but it is an interesting and impressive site in the countryside, and there is what looks like a nice walk you can take up the hill from Harestanes Visitor Centre which is located just north of Jedburgh, take the B6400 eastwards off the A68.

Edinburgh Book Festival

Banks's usual Edinburgh Book Festival appearance took place on Friday 20th August 2004 at 18:30. It should be possibly to work out how many of these Iain has attended. He has been every year since it went from being biennial to annual, and attended intermittently before that. Iain himself has not kept count.

Before his own event Iain took part in a reading for the Imprisoned Writers series that focused on female voices. This was one of the daily tributes to those "incarcerated or persecuted for their beliefs and words" organised by Amnesty International, Index on Censorship & Scottish PEN. The event was listed in **The Independent** in their "Don't Miss..." feature for the Edinburgh Festivals that day.

His personal appearance was subtitled "The Lloyds TSB Scotland Event" and did not form part of the "Science Fiction strand. Although I am sure Ken MacLeod was impressive I do feel that one author / one event does not make a strand, especially given that "Motherhood", "War Reporters", and "Poetry" strands, to pick some at random, managed five, seven and thirteen events respectively.

Iain's "Meet the Author" event began at 18:30, but the queue began forming almost an hour beforehand, the first twenty-five or so having seats. It took place in the Main Theatre, which is a 570 seater tent that was erected in Charlotte Square along with all the other temporary structures that house the book festival. Over 500 tickets were sold for the event and the main sponsors had taken three whole rows so there was only the odd empty seat around the place. The audience was typical Banks – a complete cross section. I got talking to the little old lady next to me about how the diversity of the audience reflecting the diversity of Banks's writing.

The session was hosted by Brian Taylor who introduced himself as Political editor for BBC Scotland, and whilst admitting that he had not read any of the "M" works felt confident in introducing Iain as "the best SF writer to come out of Fife". Iain began by reading from *Raw Spirit*, beginning at Macallan where they mistake him for Ian Rankin, and going to

the finish of the “Writers – What Not to Say” section. Reading this he presumably hoped to pre-empt some of the usual questions that get asked at such events. He then read from *The Algebraist*. The section he chose was from quite early in the book and was Fasson Taak’s encounter with a projected “construct” (which was not quite intelligent to qualify as an AI) that was ordering/bullying him to join a secretive security organisation for a special mission.

After the readings there were questions from the audience which like Banks’s work covered a wide variety of topics from Scottish tourism (positive he thought) through his influences and how to write scenes of torture.

Asked if he still got the same buzz from the publication of each book Iain responded that it was different now. The first was of course special and seeing it in a shop was important, and when pressed as to whether he was still “as chuffed” he replied “not quite”.

Questioned on whether he had another factual book in him, Iain admitted that there had been vague talk of *Raw Spirit* being the first in a series but he quickly knocked that on the head, and repeated what he said last year in that he would love to write factually about a trip to a hotel in space.

The perennial “what is the favourite book of your own?” was asked and elicited a comprehensive answer. Beginning with the typical author’s claim that “books are my children – 22 – bloody hell”, he then named *The Wasp Factory* for “changing my life”, *The Bridge*, for its cleverness and *A Song of Stone* for the same reason and being “very close behind it”. On the SF side he stated that *Use of Weapons* is his best, but *Consider Phlebas* as the first had a place in his heart despite “not having a discernable structure” and being “all over the place”. If only allowed to choose one he would choose *The Bridge*. Then after murmurs from the audience he then said he was sorry he hadn’t mentioned *The Crow Road*.

Some political questions were asked. Was *Dead Air* a counterpoint to other responses to 9/11? “Yeah” was the reply, to which he added about George W Bush “whenever

someone says you are either with us or against us then you have to be against them”. The anti-capitalist nature of some of Banks’s work was via a statement that capitalism was a pre-requisite for writing and whisky. “No, why?” said Iain, trying to provoke a debate, before the host interjected with “Have you sold out?” The reply was that he had to work in the current capitalist system but he believes it not to be the most efficient way of organising society, and then he commented that whisky would always be made for the sheer love of it.

Asked about his influences Iain stated that he has a list that he prints out whenever he gets a letter along these lines as he was loathed to single anybody out. He then went on to mention Austen, Tolstoy, Greene and Bellow as writers and *Catch-22* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as particular books.

Writing torture scenes is according to Banks a “technical exercise” in response to a question which highlighted the blind waiter episode in *Look to Windward*. He continued that thankfully he has no experience of this (or of changing nappies or breaking bones) and that the torturers usually had some sort of retribution taken against them, and any similarity to Itchy and Scratchy from *The Simpsons* was purely coincidental.

After the allotted hour, Iain moved to another tent and signed books cheerfully for over half an hour after the event. Drinking a bottle of McEwan’s export (a brand mentioned in many of Banks’s early books) and trying hard to sign the right name in the different types of book – “Oops, nearly put an M in that one” he said handing back a copy of *Dead Air* to a person in front of me.

As the signing was not tied to a particular book promotion people turned up with a variety of items for him to inscribe. A bookshop on site was selling the *Raw Spirit* paperbacks and the rest of Iain’s backlist, but people were bringing their well thumbed copies of *The Crow Road* and other favourites, there was a proof of *The Algebraist*, the odd early first edition was also evident as were some dealers getting the value of their stock increased.

Banks in Translation

2004 Translations

Rather than look at a particular country in depth in this issue we are looking at recent translation activity in the world of Banks.

The Czechs now have their own language version of *Vraní Ulice* (The Crow Road) produced by the wonderfully named publishers Volvox Globator. Unfortunately the dull cover does not live up to the precedent set by Argo with last year's edition of *Most* (The Bridge). Presumably this was influenced by Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, which itself is set on a bridge.



The Bridge



The Crow Road

Sötét Háttér Előtt (Against a Dark Background) was published in Hungary by Agave Kiadó at a price of 2280 Florin (c. £7.70). The translator was Torma Eszter. Available in all good Hungarian bookshops, it could also be found at #10 in a bestseller list of *Europark* magazine (June / July 2004) that included Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* at #3 and a Stephen King I could not identify at #6.

A Spanish edition of *Excesión* (Excession) was published in June by La Factoria de Ideas using the same Salwowski cover illustration as the UK editions.

On the Russian front the publishing house Azбука has reissued *Осиная Фабрика* (The Wasp Factory), *Шаги по Стеклу* (Walking on Glass), and *Мост* (The Bridge) individually with new covers, and also as an omnibus edition of all three in one volume. Existing fans that already have those books have now got an edition of *Воронья Дорога* (The Crow Road) from ЭКСМО to get to grips with. That company has also purchased the rights to

Dead Air and *Raw Spirit*. How will the latter go down in the land of vodka?



The Crow Road



The Omnibus

The German Amazon has a listing for a forthcoming book called *Das Kultur-Spiel*. This seems to be *The Player of Games* and *Use of Weapons* in a single volume. Both of these were originally published in Germany over ten years ago, and copies offered on eBay generally sell for more than their original cover price, a sure indicator of pent up demand. It is not due out until December.

Before then *L'arma finale*, an Italian edition of *Against a Dark Background* is due for publication in October. Published by Nord and translated by their usual Banks SF team of Zabini & Zuddas.

Not "THE" Iain Banks

This fanzine deals with Iain (Menzies) Banks the novelist, not (Robert) Iain Banks the Laboratory Manager of the Department of Histopathology & Molecular Pathology for Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust. Not having the first name Iain might seem a bit like cheating but as he is professionally known as Iain Banks I feel I should have some leeway. There are not that many Iain Bankses around.

Again this Iain is bespectacled and somewhat of a stranger to the blade of a razor – we have yet to find a clean shaven Iain Banks. This Banks has a few of his namesake's books but admits to only ever attempting to read *The Wasp Factory*, which he didn't finish. He has never met the author or indeed anyone else with the same name as himself.

The Algebraist

Signing Tour

Location	Shop	Day	Date	Time
London	Forbidden Planet	Monday	4/10	Lunchtime
London	Ottakar's, Wood Green	Tuesday	5/10	13:00
London	Borders, Oxford Street	Tuesday	5/10	Evening
Norwich	Ottakar's	Wednesday	6/10	19:00
London	Books Etc., Canary Wharf	Thursday	7/10	12:00 - 13:00
London	Books Etc., London Wall	Thursday	7/10	13:30 - 14:30
Oxford	Border's	Thursday	7/10	Evening
Inverness	Book Festival	Friday	8/10	18:30
Glasgow	Waterstone's, Sauchiehall Street	Monday	11/10	Evening
Edinburgh	Waterstone's, East End	Tuesday	12/10	Evening
Brighton	Waterstone's	Wednesday	13/10	13:00
Portsmouth	Ottakar's	Wednesday	13/10	Evening
Coventry	Waterstone's	Thursday	14/10	13:00
Birmingham	Waterstone's	Thursday	14/10	18:30
Nottingham	Waterstone's, Bridlesmith	Friday	15/10	Lunchtime
Sheffield	Waterstone's, Orchard Square	Friday	15/10	17:30
Durham	Literature Festival	Tuesday	19/10	19:30
Leeds	Waterstone's, Albion Street	Wednesday	20/10	Evening
Manchester	Waterstone's, Deansgate	Thursday	21/10	Evening

Please check with the venue to confirm the date, time, and whether tickets are required (definitely for the festivals and likely for the evening events which may include a reading as well as a signing). The Orbit publicity machine hope that events will be organised as well for York, Newcastle and Liverpool. Check the News section of the website: <http://www.iainbanks.net> for updates.

The Publicity

The publicity drive began when an extract from *The Algebraist* appeared in Life section of **The Guardian** (26/08/04), which had a special feature on SF. A picture of Iain even appeared above the masthead on the front page. The extract explained how the Ulubis system (where protagonist Fassin Taak lives) was cut off from the rest of the galaxy when their wormhole was destroyed.

Media publicity continues with an interview with **The Herald** newspaper, with TV appearances on BBC1 Breakfast News, and BBC News 24 / BBC World Hardtalk Extra. On radio he will be on Victoria Derbyshire's morning show on Radio 5 Live and BBC Radio Scotland's Janice Forsyth Show.

The Audio Book / Paperback

The audio book will only be available in CD format (ISBN: 1405500786) and is listed for release on November 4th. This is an abridgement by John Nicholl, although at nearly seven hours in length it is part of the trend for longer abridgements.

The UK paperback is listed for publication on July 7th 2005. ISBN: 1841492299.

Banks's Next Books

Banks's latest release marks the end of his current contract with Time Warner. At the beginning of August he was contemplating a new four year deal to produce two books: one mainstream and one Culture. However, he wants to have a definite idea for the next book before he commits to this deal.

The Banksoniain is available as a PDF from <http://efanzines.com>

If you have any corrections, comments, suggestions or contributions then email us at: banksoniain@gmail.com

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