

# The Banksoniain #5

## An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

February 2005

### Editorial

Issue #5, and I have started putting a big number in the banner title as I got confused at Novacon where I had copies of both #3 and #4 to distribute and had trouble telling them apart with a single glance.

This issue's featured book which gets the 'book biography' treatment is *Espedair Street*. As one of Iain's straightest books – a black comedy on being a rock star – it has also seen the most interest from those seeking to produce adaptations. Only one of those – the radio play – has seen the light of day, but the stories of the film, the album, the musical are told in a companion piece - **The Unwritten Banks**. Much of the **Banks Obscura** column also follows the musical theme and looks at Iain's own musical taste, related trivia and Banks inspired music.

For those of you more interested in the science fiction of Iain M. Banks the **Critical Banks** column reviews an article examining the politics of the Culture and its intervention policy.

Iain's own political activities have seen him in the press and he has added DVD reviewing to his regular album evaluating. All of which is covered with various other TV, radio and newspaper appearances in a larger than usual **Media Scanner** column.

**Banks in Translation** looks at the titles available in Turkey which includes *Espedair Street*. This issue's **Not "THE" Iain Banks** is an IT worker with a very interesting hobby.

Thanks to Gary Lloyd (who has sent me so much information that we will probably have an article about his musical work on many Banks related projects for the next four or five issues), Roger Gray, Joe Dunlop, Dave Batchelor and, of course, Iain Banks himself.

### Publication News

The US edition of *The State of the Art* was finally published by Night Shade Books. This small publishing house managed to secure the rights through contacts made when they produced editions of two of M. John Harrison's works; *Things That Never Happen* and *The Course of the Heart*. The two authors have the same agent and are friends. Near the end of January came the news that the company had also obtained the US rights to *The Algebraist*. Banks's latest book is currently scheduled for publication in the USA in September 2005. A signed limited edition version is also planned.

The UK paperback in B format of *The Algebraist* (ISBN: 1841492299) is currently listed for publication on July 4<sup>th</sup>. The Italian rights for this book have been picked up by Editrice Nord.

### Banks Live

Iain will be appearing with Ken MacLeod at the Glasgow Writer's Festival on 24th February 2005. See <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk>

Iain will be on his own when he returns to his old university to talk at the MacRobert Centre, Stirling on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2005 at 19:00. See <http://www.macrobert.org/>

### Banks's Next Books

The new contract is signed and the next Banks book should be appearing in the shops around the summer of 2006. This will be a mainstream one which he plans to start thinking about in the early summer and writing in October. For the Culture deprived amongst you, a reminder that the one after that will see a return to your beloved setting. He already has the beginning worked out.

## Media Scanner

Too late for issue #4, the **Daily Telegraph** (6/11/04) published their review of *The Algebraist* under the title "When wormholes collapse; A space opera on a gigantic scale impresses Andrew McKie.". He did find some points to criticise "It is too long. It has crude moments. There are points at which one loses the thread - and, more alarmingly, suspects the author has, too", before concluding that "There is ambition of purpose here which matches the scale of the action."

The SFX review of 2004 saw John Jarrold pick *The Algebraist* as one of the 10 books of the year. The review commented that as usual with Banks you "get plenty of bangs for your bucks" and called it "the best of his non-Culture books".

Another review that did not see the light of cyberspace before issue #4 was that on the Amazon website. David Langford describes the story of Fassin's journey and discoveries as "exhilarating, witty, sometimes mind-boggling" before commenting on the weaponry and the Dwellers and concluding that "Once again Banks is having enormous fun with space opera, and his exuberant enjoyment is infectious."

Speaking of Amazon, a short video clip of Iain talking about *Dead Air* can be found on their page for the paperback edition – look for the "Watch the Author" link. The twenty-six second clip has Iain introducing the book he described it as a "polemical thriller" with bits of comedy and tragedy and hoped it kept you on the edge of your seat (like the central character was for a while) and was enjoyable.

*The Algebraist* continued to feature in the Hardback fiction bestseller lists in **The Independent**, at #7 (5/11/04) and #8 (12/11/04) but was not in the top ten published on 19/11/04.

Benjamin Secher reviewed *The Crow Road* on DVD for the **Daily Telegraph** (12/11/04) describing the series as "fine television, redolent with dark humour, and faultlessly cast". Mentioning the extras he says "Banks himself appears in an interview that shows the burly Scot to be every bit as endearing and

down-to-earth as his characters". In the same paper (11/12/04) it made Philip Horne's "DVDs of the Year" list and was described as a "welcome DVD release for this immensely satisfying TV adaptation of Iain Banks's erudite detective novel". It also noted that "Banks himself describes as 'better in every way than the novel'" and that on the Internet Movie Database is gets a rating of 9.1 out of 10, "beating *Citizen Kane*, *North by Northwest* and *The Godfather*."

Iain presented the writing award to Louise Welsh (author of *The Cutting Room*) at the Glenfiddich Spirit of Scotland Awards (Scotsman 16/11/04). The award ceremony was broadcast on Scottish TV (30/11/04).

The answers for the Bookworm's Christmas Quiz were published in the **Daily Mail** (14/01/05) included Iain M. Banks. The question "Under what name (precisely) does Iain Banks write his science-fiction novels?" had been set in the edition from 17/12/04 which also reported of **The List's** annual "Hot 100" of the country's most creative people. The List is a Scottish entertainment listing magazine. Top were pop band Franz Ferdinand. Iain Banks was at #75 ahead of fellow author Ian Rankin #85 but way behind Alexander McCall Smith (Number One Ladies Detective Agency) at #10.

Banks was one of the Edinburgh Festival participants that signed a giant letter to Chancellor Gordon Brown as part of the Make Poverty History campaign reported the Autumn newsletter of **Jubilee Scotland** ([www.jubileescotland.org.uk](http://www.jubileescotland.org.uk)).

Reports that Banks was supporting the call to impeach the Prime Minister, put him alongside playwright Harold Pinter, musician Brian Eno (**Newcastle Journal** 24/11/04), author Frederick Forsyth and actors Susan Wooldridge, Andy de la Tour and Corin Redgrave (**Daily Telegraph** 25/11/04). The actual press conference was apparently a bit of a farce, with the politicians unable to organise a suitable room.

The **Mirror** (20/12/04) reported that Iain Banks and AL Kennedy had backed the mother of a "Scottish soldier killed in Iraq who had made a film to send to Cherie Blair."

Alastair Gilmour wrote about Glenfiddich in **The Newcastle Journal** (27/11/04) and mentioned how in *Raw Spirit*, Iain Banks had picked out their Havana Reserve as his favourite.

Banks popped up on **The DVD Collection** (19/11/04) on the digital television channel **BBC4** to review the special edition of George Lucas's *THX-1138*. Iain commented that he watched it in the early 1970s and was a bit bored then and was a little bit bored watching it again but it was worthy of viewing and enjoyed seeing the "Lucasian tropes". Describing it as a fable rather than a vision of the future he thought Robert Duval's performance was very good playing against the brain numbing blandness of the design. Iain then wondered what would happen if Lucas had not moved on the do adolescent films. Stuart Marconie chose it as the best of the films reviewed that week, calling it "sci-fi for grown ups, with characters that you would be hard pushed to turn into posable figurines".

Iain was one of the five authors featured in a set of 90 second fillers on the digital radio station **BBC7** in a slot called "**Writers on Writing**". He made the analogy of how science fiction is like writing for a "cathedral filling organ", comparing it to mainstream which is "just a piano". Although you can do great things with just a piano the organ gives you three keyboards and a set of foot peddles to play with, which allows you to "pull out all the stops". In science fiction, he continued, you can change the laws of physics - "you can't do that in a Hampstead novel". It is available to listen at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbc7/drama/writers4.shtml>

Iain's semi-regular tenure as a guest reviewer on **Marc Riley's Rocket Science**, broadcast on another digital radio station, BBC 6Music, continues. On 14/11/04 as usual he reviewed three albums. In the general chit-chat it was revealed that the two had finally met in person whilst Iain was on the promotional tour for *The Algebraist*. The publisher is still paying for the curries so Iain took that as a good sign that they still wanted him.

A 'new' John Lennon album, *Acoustic*, was described by Marc as "a strange beast" and praised by Iain "for some powerful stuff" but

he also said that there was some filler and that he "bailed out when Yoko started singing". Iain was impressed by The Autumns self-titled album, but thought their chord structures "went out in the fifties". *Life Blood* by The Manic Street Preachers was described a beautifully produced product that got in the way of hearing the tunes. Iain commented that it sometimes took him quite a few listens to decide if he did actually like a record and that the jury was still out on this last one, but he probably did like it.

Banks missed his scheduled appearance on Saturday 15/01/05 when he called in sick that morning. A mostly recuperated Banks did appear on 22/01/05 and reviewed albums from: Mercury Rev, Gruff Rhys and Emiliana Torrini, and ranked them in that order. Iain will buy the first and put it on his new iPod. Marc asked for a quick update on the flying lessons and Iain said that he managed three very good landings in his last lesson and thinks he's "got it".

Duncan Petrie, who is Professor of Film at the University of Auckland has published a book about the literary and cinematic renaissance in cultural expression that has taken place in Scotland over the last twenty years. Amongst the novelists he examines is Iain Banks as well as Alasdair Gray, Irvine Welsh, Ian Rankin and many more.

*Contemporary Scottish Fictions - Film, Television and the Novel*

Edinburgh University Press (2004)

ISBN: 0748617892

Iain hosted an auction of rare whisky for the charity Cystic Fibrosis Trust with some lots that included signed copies of *Raw Spirit* along with some of the whiskies mentioned in the text. He sold off the first three lots at McTear's auction house in Glasgow on December 8<sup>th</sup> 2004.

Iain was joined by Ken MacLeod, AL Kennedy and Neil Davidson in writing to **The Herald** (27/01/05) to complain that Waterstone's sacking of employee and blogger Joe Gordon was an over-reaction and an infringement on his freedom of speech. Joe has since found a position with Forbidden Planet.

# Banks Obscura

## Personal Effects

*Personal Effects* is the name of Iain Banks's contribution to the EMI SongBook Series. The company invited a variety of literary and artistic figures including Clive Barker; Gerry Anderson and Hunter S. Thompson to pick their favourite tracks, although they were constrained to the EMI and Virgin catalogues.

Iain's CD has twenty tracks and is named after the only solo album of the fictional Daniel Weir (Weird) from *Espedair Street*. The accompanying booklet has an introduction from Iain describing how he used to make compilation tapes for his car, and also his thoughts of each of the individual tracks which are:

1. Don't Bang The Drum - The Waterboys
2. Heroes - David Bowie
3. Little Britain - Dreadzone
4. Factory - Warren Zevon
5. Man child - Neneh Cherry
6. Get Up Stand Up - Peter Tosh
7. Satisfaction - Devo
8. Pretty Vacant - The Sex Pistols
9. Karma Police - Radiohead
10. For Michael Collins - Jethro Tull
11. Walking Down Madison - Kirsty MacColl
12. Shot By Both Sides - Magazine
13. Careful - Horse
14. Echo Beach - Martha & The Muffins
15. Babylon's Burning - The Ruts
16. Unexpected Join - Ivor Cutler
17. Sleeping Satellite - Tasmin Archer
18. 1952 Vincent Black Lightning - Richard Thompson
19. Dark Moon High Tide - Afro Celt Sound System
20. Love Anyway - Mike Scott

There is an endnote where Banks namechecks many other bands and tracks that he could very easily have included in the compilation. The whole package is attractively designed to look like a Banks book, with a cover design and internal illustrations in black and white by Peter Brown merging images from the covers of many of Banks's mainstream novels.

A joint interview with Iain Banks and Ivor Cutler appeared in the magazine **Dazed & Confused** (#52, March 1999) to publicise the

release. Ivor as well as being on Iain's track list had been asked to create his own compilation "*Cute (H)ey?*". Iain revealed that he had been a long time fan of Ivor's and when *The Wasp Factory* was published had sent a copy to Ivor. It was sent back "with a polite asking if Iain wanted some money.

The interviewer, Nicky Wise, quoted from the EMI press release which described the participants in the series as each being "blessed with a unique and occasionally perverse sense of sound and demented vision".

Ivor's compilation is described as "organic" and Iain agreed it was more "integrated" than his which was "all over the place", the interviewer was more polite calling it sentimental and nostalgic. Iain also commented that he could have chosen a different set of tracks so that people reading his list would think him very cultured. He opted for an honest list as it was simpler.

*Personal Effects*

CD: EMI (1999), ISBN 1858485622.

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## Not "THE" Iain Banks

This fanzine deals with the novelist Iain (Menzie) Banks not the "IT bod" Iain (Robert) Banks. This Iain is a rocketry enthusiast and I found him through his website "Iain's Rockets" <http://iains-rockets.info> where he lists his launches. He builds his own rockets and then sends them skyward at speeds of greater than Mach 1. If you fancy doing this yourself get in contact with the UK Rocketry Association at <http://www.ukra.org.uk> - or your local equivalent for some safety advice.

He is our first confirmed Iain Banks without facial hair he also does not wear glasses so there is no chance of him being visually mistaken for his namesake. He says that people do recognise the name, even in France and Spain where he sometimes travels for work. He has never met the novelist or indeed any other Iain Banks, although he did mention that he sometimes gets emails for the graffiti artist "Banksy". He has read *Canal Dreams* and enjoyed it, but tried *The Wasp Factory* and never got past the second page.

## Banks Obscura

### Another Piece

One of the little nuggets of information that Gary Lloyd mentioned to me is that another version of the short story *Piece* from the collection *The State of the Art* is currently a work in progress. Roger Gray, wrote a film script based on this story when he was a student and Gary persuaded him to adapt it as a radio play as he thought it would be an ideal demonstration piece for their collaborative work.

The voice recording and editing has all been done and Gary is working on the music and then the final mix will be done in his studio. The stars of the work are: Iain Banks as the narrator and main character, Ken MacLeod as the Old Man, Roger Gray as Mo, with Gary and his wife Christiane as crash investigators.

Roger is apparently a little frustrated that Gary has not got round to finishing the music which includes a tune that Iain Banks wrote that Gary was very impressed with.

An article about the 1991 BBC radio dramatization of *Piece* can be found in issue #1 of **The Banksoniain**.

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### Orchestral Manoeuvres in Literature

Question: What do Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, Updike's *Witches of Eastwick*, Casanova's *History of My Life*, Trollope's *Warden*, Fuller's *Trio*, Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* and also his *Haunting Fingers*, all have in common with Iain Banks's *Canal Dreams*?

Answer: They all feature cellos, as noted in the 1997 article "An Eloquent Companion (Cellos in Literature)" by M. Boyd which can be found in **The Strad**, "a classical music magazine for all strings enthusiasts", although for those who prefer a larger instrument the same publishers have a separate magazine called **Double Bassist**.

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### *The Exiles' Progress*

The US edition of *The Wasp Factory*, reported that reported that Iain had just finished his second, *The Exile's Progress*. This is a working title for *Walking on Glass*.

### Inspired by the Iain Banks novel

In 2001 the Canadian group STATIONa released a 53 minute CD called *The Wasp Factory* on the Vancouver based label F. Flyer Records (FF-314).



The tracks are: 'Call it progress'; 'Sacrifice poles'; 'Rabbit grounds'; 'I am a city'; 'Survival of the nastiest'; 'Minor art classics'; 'Steelies from a catapult'; 'Exploder'; 'Vomits'; 'Kick at the flowers'; 'Hot sheep'; 'Prodigal' and 'North wind'. These titles actually give a decent précis of the book, with perhaps something mentioning father the only glaring omission.

The band formed in 1995 and consisted of: Sean Maxey, guitar, vocals; Chris Sharpe, guitar, drums, percussion; Barry Higginson, bass and Jeff Sebastian, drums. This was the last of their three albums, the others being *Diffrent Parts: Songs from the Backburner* and *Uptight Creek*. They split in 2002, however, three of these four went on to form another band called The Doers who from a quick perusal of gig lists in British Columbia are still playing together.

The clock-face CD shown above, and the landscape cover, below, are artwork by band member Sean Maxey.



## Espedair Street

*Espedair Street* was published on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1987 and was Banks's second publication of that year, part of his prolific period, where reworking his old science fiction novels and writing new mainstream ones allowed him to produce seven books in the five year period that spanned the publication of *Consider Phlebas* to *The Crow Road*.

The story is that of Daniel Weir, otherwise known by the name Weird, from his school register entry of Weir, D. He goes from being a grease monkey at Dinwoodies to become the driving force behind one of the 1970s biggest progressive rock bands. *Espedair Street* has a dark opening with the protagonist telling the reader of his suicidal thoughts, but in reality it is one of Banks's lighter works, and even has a happy ending.

The idea of a rock novel occurred to Banks in about 1985, and his initial thoughts were to write in a contemporary setting. However, as he admitted to Justin Reed in an interview in **The Independent** (08/01/98), in his university days in the 1970s he had written songs, and therefore decided to set the book then as he already had much of the lyrical raw material. In the same interview he commented that part of what he wanted to achieve was to set "a fantasy novel set in reality".

The fantasy of *Espedair Street* is that of alternative biography rather than science fiction, which had overtly influenced *Walking on Glass* and *The Bridge*. The post *Consider Phlebas* publication Banks seems happier to separate his genres with what James Hale described as "a modest sex, drugs and rock n roll number". David Howell in *Book and Magazine Collector* (#148) calls it Banks's "most accessible work" with an almost "romantic feel to it". This may have been influenced by the author's feeling for the setting of the book. At the time of writing Iain had moved out of London to Faversham in Kent and was still around two years from his return to Scotland.

He also admitted to Justin that as well saving his songs for posterity by whistling the tunes

to them into a cassette recorder he had arranged them into albums and designed covers for them. For example, "The band's first album is called *Liquid Ice*, and the sleeve depicts 'blue tinged ice in a tank and a gigantic teardrop shaped blob of gold smashing into it, caught in freeze-frame'." Banks's own tunes will surface again in the story of the various *Espedair Street* adaptations detailed in **The Unwritten Banks** on page #8. The cover designs were "in smudged pencil and about the size of a postage stamp" so probably not worth the bother of retrieving from the back of the cupboard where Iain thinks they are.

The author has described the structure of *Espedair Street* as a reaction to the complicated one of *The Bridge*, as well as commenting to Simon McKenzie for a 1995 interview in **Time Off**, "It was a fun book to write, I enjoyed it". The flashback narrative still made its screen adaptation a problem that Roger Gray, the screenplay writer, struggled with on and off for eighteen months before arranging the storyline into an a cinematic structure he was happy with.

Many theories have been put forward as to potential models for the band Frozen Gold with Fleetwood Mac a popular choice along with Pink Floyd. The Rob Reiner film, *This is Spinal Tap*, was released in 1984, and *Espedair Street* was written in Banks's 1986/7 winter writing period. Another fictional rock group that may have had a small influence are Disaster Area from Douglas Adams's *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*. The fear that the Frozen Gold PA system might need to be "covered by the SALT agreement" if it was any more powerful, is raised at one point, echoing Disaster Area who are banned from many worlds "because the band's public address system contravene local strategic arms limitations treaties". Incidentally, Frozen Gold's first album lasts forty-two minutes. For a discussion of the *Walking on Glass* Hitchhiker links see issue #2.

In an interview in **The Times** (21/12/97) that marked a "live" charity appearance of Frozen Gold and previewed the radio series Iain commented that at the time he listened to Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones but not

Emerson Lake and Palmer, and that the “music tries to capture the era and explain the character”. At his appearance at the Edinburgh Festival in 2004 Banks was asked if he had any group in mind as a model for Frozen Gold, and repeated a description he has used many times before, saying that he had visualised them as a sort of cross between Led Zeppelin and Abba.

Fish, of Marillion fame, is often suggested by readers as a potential source for Weird. Iain and Fish featured in a “How we met” article in **The Independent** (25/04/1999). Iain commented that Fish probably was in the back of his mind when he created Weird, “a wee subliminal influence”. It turns out that they were introduced after the publication of *Espedair Street* by Neil Gaiman. Neil asked Fish if he had read it and told him he should as “the hero of that book is you!” As Mr Gaiman knows practically everybody, he put the two in contact and Iain ended up going for a drink with Fish at the latter’s local, and Iain said “friendship has developed on a liquid basis”.

Weird, so Banks claims, was made tall, ugly and awkward around women as otherwise he feared readers would hate him for the musical and financial success that he achieves. Other Internet theories on characterisation include Banks’s left-wing fellow author and friend, Ken MacLeod being the model for Weird’s Communist friend McCann.

The critical reaction seems to have been mixed. Chris Petit in **The Times** (24/09/87) was not impressed by another rock novel, describing it as an “unwise career move” for the “hitherto rather fancied Iain Banks” with the “tune sentimental and familiar” being about “how it gets lonely at the top”. A year and a day later in **The Sunday Times**, Austin MacCurtain’s review of the paperback edition struck a different note, “a stunning piece of writing, acutely perceptive in its witty exposure and celebration of the desperate hedonism of the 1970s”.

The public reaction was such that the book was reprinted before publication. The cover of the hardback portrays the Frozen Gold single *Another Rainy Day* in its brightly coloured single sleeve designed in house at

Macmillan by Robert Updergraf. Futura issued a paperback in the UK with a Leslie Howard cover in 1988 and Abacus produced their edition with the Peter Brown cover in 1992, and then with the guitar in the sky photographic cover.

*Espedair Street* was translated into Danish by John Theodor Thomsen for publishing house Klim who produced the book in 1990. John has also translated *The Bridge*, *The Player of Games*, *The Wasp Factory*, *Use of Weapons* and *Complicity* for them. Japanese, Russian and Turkish translations have also been produced. The rights for US and Polish editions have been sold but these do not seem to have seen the light of day yet.

Some of the locations in the book are made up but many are real. Espedair Street is a real road in Paisley, and Ferguslie Park is an area of the town. Paisley College of Technology has now achieved University status. The Griffin can be found at 266 Bath Street in Glasgow, and was the subject of a visit by the journalist Hunter Davis for a column in **Daily Mail** called ‘The Literary Lunch’. Unfortunately Weird’s home is an imaginary creation, as Banks explained to Simon McKenzie in 1995 it is an “amalgam of various things, slightly weird properties on that side of Glasgow”. The particular spot where it doesn’t stand is the junction of three roads which do exist and is easily findable. I hope to visit some of these sites when I am in Glasgow for the 2005 Worldcon, so expect some pictures in the issue after that.

The book is dedicated to “Les [McFarlane], and all in the People’s Republic of Glenfinnan”. Les is as old school friend of Iain’s from his Greenock High School days. He is mentioned in *Raw Spirit* with various stories of Iain’s visits to Glenfinnan to see Les and his family and his sailing exploits with the dedicatee. The McFarlane’s are also involved with Iain in the company FLEE, otherwise known as Fife-Lochaber Explosive Entertainments.

The name of Daniel Weir’s fictional solo album, *Personal Effects*, was used by Banks in his compilation album for EMI in their Songbook Series, see **Banks Obscura** on page #3.

# The Unwritten Banks

*Espedair Street* has seen various proposals for adaptation over the years some of which have reached public fruition and some of which have not

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## The Radio Series

Produced in Scotland for BBC Radio 4 this adaptation is in four parts of thirty minutes with a full cast. Initially broadcast in a late evening slot in January 1998 it was repeated almost exactly a year later.

The dramatization was by Joe Dunlop and the director was Dave Batchelor. The idea had come from Joe who had previously produced a short version for Scandinavian Schools Radio as part of their English language programme, and before that had read it for the RNIB Talking Book Service. It took Joe five years and a variety of rejections to progress from the twenty minute version to the two hour one. The BBC were concerned that it would be too 'Spinal Tap' like. It was the documentary structure that allowed Joe to keep the non-linear narrative that Iain employs which finally clinched the go ahead.

Instead of Weird telling his own story, the music journalist and broadcaster Paul Gambaccini acts as a narrator of a Radio One series 'Espedair Street: The Frozen Gold Story' and we get to hear the old "275 and 285 - Radio One" jingle. The rockumentary is then inter-cut with the "real" events that it mentions, and also extracts from the songs, which also play under many of the scenes. At the end of the final episode we discover that Weird has been listening with Jean and Dawn.

Joe is an actor as well as writer and has read *The Crow Road* for the RNIB. His original radio writing credits include *Getting Mad* and *Remember Live Aid*, which is currently in development as a film. After the radio series was done he contacted Iain with ideas for a stage version but he did not manage to interest a producer.

Tom Morton's review of the first episode in **The Scotsman** (10/01/1998) commented that the way the "spoof rockumentary" is constructed relegated Weird's personal rise

and fall away from its position at the centre of book as the whole band became the focus of attention. He praised the songs for "capturing the innocent portentousness" of the time and also the actors playing the main roles. The cast was headed by John Gordon-Sinclair (stalwart of many British sitcoms and the film *Gregory's Girl*) playing Weird, with the main support from Louise Beattie (Laura Johnstone in *Emmerdale*) as Christine and James MacPherson (Mike Jardine in *Taggart*) as Crazy Davey.

The reviewer from the **Mail on Sunday** (11/01/1998), Tracy MacLeod, could not think of a currently less fashionable musical form in which to dabble but ended up finding the songs "much less corny than the dramatic action". Her problem was that "there was no trace of Banks's trademark brand of Gothic perversity" and that every fictional rock'n'roll cliché there is apart from the audition scene.

The extracts of songs were sung by Monica Queen (lead singer of Thrum, and guest vocalist for Belle and Sebastian) and the rest of the band were Nigel Clark (Hue and Cry guitarist), Brian Kellock (Jazz pianist from the John Rae Collective), Nick Clark (Bluebells guitarist) and Gordon Wilson (session drummer). They even performed a live gig the Arches Theatre in Glasgow as Frozen Gold on behalf of the disability charity Enable on 21st December 1997.

The songs were credited to Iain Banks and the arrangements to Nigel Clark. Iain provided Nigel with a mini-disc of the whistled tunes that he had created and worked them up into what is heard in the series. The BBC currently have no plans to release the series, so your best option if you haven't heard it is to lobby for a repeat on BBC7. A copy of the script can be found in the Scottish Theatre Archive at the University of Glasgow library.

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## The Film

The story of the film begins with an act of generosity. A friend of Iain's, Roger Gray, who works in advertising, but who had worked on the promotion of a number of films and was therefore knowledgeable about the business, had got into the habit of spending in birthday in Scotland. On one of

these visits (1996) he was asking about the progress of the film projects of his friend's books. At this time the only one not optioned was *Espedair Street*. Iain said that he wanted to sell it to someone that would let him have first shot at providing the music. Iain then suggested that Roger could be that person and that he could have the option for his birthday. This arrangement was subsequently formalised with Roger paying a price of £1 for the rights. The music will be covered in the next section.

After this "sale" it turned out that a company called Natural Nylon were interested in the rights but were told they were not available. Natural Nylon was a production company started in 1996 by some of the brightest talent of the British film industry, as well as some not in front of the camera people, in order to develop their own projects. These luminaries included: Jude Law, Sadie Frost, Ewan MacGregor, Sean Pertwee and Jonny Lee Miller. The last of these had the lead role in the big screen version of *Complicity*.

Roger subsequently bumped into Damon Bryant (one of the non-actors involved in Natural Nylon) and Ewan MacGregor in a club (as you do) and they asked about the script and who was making it. He replied that he had nearly finished but that no-one was making it as yet. This led to various meetings which included Brad Adams of Union Pictures and a deal was agreed that included Roger getting paid for the script. The script went through some more iterations and Iain helped tidy it up as well before it was used to get actors and a director on board in order to get financial backing. By now it was the year 2000 and the project was well into the pre-production hell.

The first page of the script was published in **The Culture** fanzine issue #6. The scene is of Weird walking through the streets of Paisley carrying a guitar and papers which he manages to drop after catching the guitar on a lamppost and bumping into a variety of people. A voice over done by an older Weird introduces himself and the story.

The full script was reviewed in **The Culture** issue #12 by Peter Dawson. He commented that Roger's script was faithful to the book

with changes made to allow the story to be told cinematically. One of these is to develop the plot in a linear fashion and tantalisingly hints at another which is described as "a sting in the tail" are made which promise that it is "nothing out of keeping with the character of the novel".

Roger Gray has been known to post in the newsgroup alt.books.iain-banks, and in a couple of these missives he mentioned potential castings. The fact that Sarah Michelle Geller (Roger's choice) and Angeline Jolie (the director's choice) were mentioned at different times as being in the frame for the role of Christine gave away the fact that that part had be written for an American. Roger justifies this in that he always thought that the character was always a bit too confident and sexually aware for a young Scottish girl in the 1970s. He therefore changed her into the daughter of an American serviceman which had the added benefit of potentially getting a big name US actress to attract North America money to the film.

For the part of Weird, Roger had always favoured David Thewlis, and he was attached to the project for quite a while. Others from Roger's wish list that he mentioned were John Hannah and Famke Janssen, as well as Ewan MacGregor through the Natural Nylon involvement.

As time went by the proposed source of the money were not entirely happy with the choice of director as it would have been his first feature, the lack of a "Hollywood" name and the fact that Roger was an untested script-writer. There were also difficulties with both the production companies. Natural Nylon unravelled, Jude and Sadie split up and all the actors had straight acting projects as well as trying to produce. In the end Sean Pertwee was quoted as saying "People liked the fact we hung out together. They thought that was groovy and it defeated the object, which was to make good quality films". Union Pictures is currently in receivership.

Roger has also written a script for *The Bridge* for Union Pictures (see issue #3) which Ewan MacGregor had specifically asked to be completed. For Damon Bryant (after he left Natural Nylon) Roger has produced a script of

*Dead Air*, with Dougray Scott, who played Lewis in *The Crow Road* and has recently been touted as the next James Bond, in the frame for Ken. Although these projects have did not get the go ahead when they initially proposed this does not mean they are dead and buried. Look at the fact that the film of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* will be out in April, twenty-five years after the rights were first sold. Roger is hopeful that because there are people in the film industry who have read the scripts and are very keen to do these projects then they could all still be made. However, don't hold your breath.

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### The Album / The Musical

These two projects are intertwined and to some extent also go with the film discussed in the previous section. The deal between Roger Gray and Union Pictures/Natural Nylon left room for Iain to have first shot at providing the songs. The producers therefore wanted to hear some of the tracks. At this point Gary Lloyd was drafted in as a musical expert known to both Roger and Iain. His brief was to turn Iain's whistles into working demo tracks, and he viewed this with some trepidation as he was not looking forward to potentially having to tell a friend not to give up the day job.

A visit to North Queensferry resulted in a couple of surprises for Gary. Firstly the sheer amount of songs that Iain had written, "hundreds", and secondly that he also had a good ear "for a decent – even catchy – tune". Over a few days the two selected an albumsworth of material to work up into proper demos.

Gary's enthusiasm for the songs led Iain to suggest that they make an album anyway irrespective of whether the film project went ahead or not. Iain was ready to audition for session musicians to create a 1970s rock band in the late 1990s. However, Gary was somewhat hesitant about this idea and a month later when Iain was visiting Chester Gary proposed an alternative suggestion that a tribute album using guest performers on each song might be the way to go. Iain apparently almost fell off his chair the restaurant they were in when Gary said this.

By the end of 2000 Gary and a guitarist friend, Nick Gilliam, had worked the demos up to a state where they had got a record producer interested. The producer wanted more work done on the tracks and as Gary had other commitments and Nick had taken a full time teaching job the project went on the backburner for a while.

At the end of 2003 Gary looked again at the project. He knew that the tracks still needed some work and was looking for a guru with established pop credentials to assist. The possibility of a musical also went through his head at this time, most likely on the back of the successes of shows like *Mama Mia* and *We Will Rock You* in London theatres. The musical was also publicly mentioned by Iain when he appeared in his review slot on Marc Riley's *Rocket Science* late in 2004. Gary commented that the musical would be even more work than the album has been so far, but a successful album would make it more of a possibility. As he said, "it has everything for the medium - a great tale, great songs, a lot of tragedy and triumph and great opportunities for spectacular stage effects". The *Great Contra-Flow Smoke Curtain* would, of course, need to go through stringent health and safety checks.

Gary eventually came up with the notion that he and Iain could be the producers and the guest artists could help with the rewriting and arranging on their individual tracks. At the beginning of 2005 that is the current plan. Gary is working full-time on this project and is keeping the names he has interested very close to his chest, but hopes to have it completed this year. Although the basic tunes are the same as the ones that were developed into the songs on the radio series Gary says that they have been treated in an entirely different way and should result in what he says will be "a much rawer and experimentally-edged sounding affair". Iain is also actively involved in the music again with Gary recently having visited to set up some new software on the Banks's Mac and they hope to actually record in both of their houses. Gary promises to keep **Banksoniain** readers informed of any developments, which should come after his next visit to Scotland in early March.

## Banks in Translation

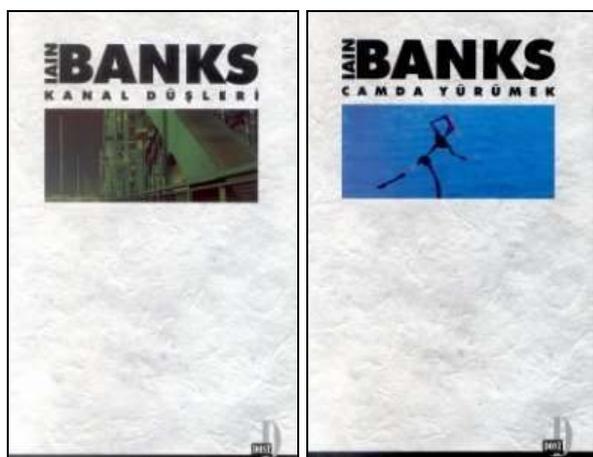
### Turkish Delight

Until the recent revaluation of the Turkish Lira you needed to be a millionaire to own a Banks book in Turkish, but then you needed to be a millionaire to buy most things there. Banks seems to have two publishers in Turkey: Dost Kýtavevú and Ayrinti Yayinlari,

*Epekarýsý Fabrikasý* (The Wasp Factory) was published by Ayrinti Yayinlari in 1996, after being translated by Aslý Biçen. *Rock Laneti* (Espedair Street) was published in the same year and translated by Aysun Babacan.



In 2001 Dost Kýtavevú published both *Kanal Düpleri* (Canal Dreams) and *Camda YürümeK* (Walking on Glass), translated by Özgür Kurtuluş and Baþak Diktürk respectively.



A third publishing house, OM, look to have purchased rights to *Complicity* and *The Business*, but these books do not seem to have seen the light of day yet. There also seems to be a distinct lack of The Culture and the rest of Banks's science fiction in Turkey.

## eBayWatch

An optimistic seller listed what admittedly was a very nice looking signed first edition of *The Wasp Factory* for £180. The item was immediately re-listed at the same price even though no buyers had emerged over the ten days of the original auction.

A number of other signed first editions have failed to sell recently as well. A copy of *A Song of Song* listed at £19.99, and a *Whit* at £9.99 both failed to attract a single bid, with neither of the accompanying photographs depicting the signature this may show some maturity and scepticism in the marketplace.

Of items that did sell a first of *The Wasp Factory* made £36.00, one of *The Player of Games* attracted 13 bids and reached £31.00, and another of *The Bridge* with "some scratching" to the dust wrapper went for £26.00.

Prices for *The Algebraist* seem to have settled down since in the post publication period with signed versions going for between £11.00 and £17.00. A paperback version, presumably the one that gets sold in airports went for £4.65

The new *The Crow Road* DVDs have sold for between £12.00 and £16.00 whilst a copy of the VHS version made £3.41 a little less than the DVD of *Complicity* sold for £4.32.

Odd lot for this quarter must go to a paperback pairing of a signed copy Banks's *A Song of Stone* with an edition of Jeffrey Archer's, *The Eleventh Commandment*, signed "To Bruce, Happy reading". Remarkably there were two bidders, although the final price was just £3.29

A price guide for first editions and a variety of Banks oddities was published in the January edition of *Book and Magazine Collector*. It was accompanied by an interview with Iain conducted by Paul Willets that took place during *The Algebraist* tour and follows on from a previous 1996 article about Banks. In the next issue we will have a special column to compare the prices with inflation over this period to asses the investment performance of Banks first editions.

## Critical Banks

Millennium: Journal of International Studies, is published by the London School of Economics. The December 2001 issue (vol. 30, no. 2) was a special issue that was subtitled "Images and Narratives in World Politics". Its editorial describes it as "an attempt to explore how images and narratives can excite the study of world politics". To this end there are a number of articles about how international relations is portrayed in popular culture.

There were the articles 'Grab A Phaser Ambassador': *Diplomacy In Star Trek* by Iver B. Neumann, as well as *Cinema And Ecopolitics: Existence In The Jurassic Park* by Mark J. Lacy, and *Globalisation and Science Fiction* by Jutta Weldes, but the one that concerns this fanzine is 'Special Circumstances': *Intervention by a Liberal Utopia* by Chris Brown, Professor of International Relations at the LSE.

Professor Brown assesses the way that Contact, and its subsection Special Circumstances, go about formulating the principles by which the Culture relates to other civilisations, in an article derived from a paper first given in May 2001.

The professor begins his discussion with a quote from *Inversions*, which he confidently states to be part of the Culture canon, ignoring the faction that maintain that it is not as there aren't any ships in it. He also usefully makes the point that the term 'human' is used in a generic sense, as the Culture are not a far future Earth civilisation.

Brown picks out two "pillars" as defining The Culture. Firstly that it is a post-scarcity civilization with "access to unlimited supplies of energy" (noting that the energy grid that permits this is wisely never described), and secondly, the "benign, sentient AIs", the Minds. These two factors allow Banks to create a "psychologically acute picture" of how "a liberal anarchy might work" as constraints are removed but temptation to misuse power is avoided.

The Culture "contains, undermines, subverts and if necessary destroys" the "cruel

expansionist xenophobic empires" that it encounters. This is done, he notes, with "no compunction" about such interventions, "the only real issues are instrumental". The interventions are carried out by Contact and Special Circumstances which are civilian bodies that perform military roles when necessary such as the Irdiran war which was deemed to be self-defence.

The political nature of Banks's novels is assessed whom Brown notes has in interviews said that The Culture is "an expression of wish-fulfilment" with benevolent AIs and 'humans' depicted as "genuinely contented hedonists" as opposed to the inhabitants of *Brave New World*, whose happiness is *soma*-induced." The drug glands are conveniently ignored, and could be argued to be voluntary rather than enforced.

The Liberal Utopia that the author uses in the title of the article is only possible he suggests because of the all powerful Minds. He contends that this is also one of the problems of the novels with the Minds being "too powerful" and "too good", but admits that the fact that they can be mistaken is a saving grace along with the fact that they can be tempted, as they are in *Excession*, by their quest of knowledge and technology.

Brown's concluding remarks on *Look to Windward* point at the ambiguity of the final sentence "we might be becoming too soft". Is this The Culture as a whole or simply the Minds? He speculates that it is something that Banks might explore if he continues the series. We may see sometime in 2007.

Overall I thought this a thought provoking study that avoided the is it /isn't it the US argument that usually dominates any discussion of The Culture, for a general discussion of interventionist politics as informed by Banks's science fiction.

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*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](mailto:banksoniain@gmail.com)

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