

The Banksoniain #7

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

August 2005

Editorial

Apologies for a shorter edition than normal, but the last one was a little late and this one is a little early in the notional schedule as I wanted to get it out in time for the 63rd World Science Fiction Convention – Interaction – being held in Glasgow, August 4th - 8th. Anyway without pictures there are still over five thousand words of Banksinalia within.

The jiggery-pokery that last issue saw *The State of the Art* slotted into Banks's UK publication order with its US publication date, means that this issue's featured book is *The Player of Games* rather than *Canal Dreams* – it's all part of the Masterplan. The centre-spread 'book biography' looks, as usual, at the context of the book within Banks's oeuvre, the critical reaction it received, and introduces some of ideas that commentators have picked up in the novel. There is also a column on the story of the film of the book

The Algebraist UK paperback publicity tour gets a quick overview with Banks's appearance in Cambridge covered in depth. There is also a short article about the makeover that has just occurred for the UK paperback 'M' backlist.

Banks in Translation heads to the Iberian peninsula to celebrate the Spanish rights for *The Algebraist* being sold. **Media Scanner** précises the press coverage that Iain has had in the last few months, but a few of the other regular columns are abandoned to the expediency of early publication.

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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Banks Live

Iain will be making his usual appearance at the Edinburgh Book Festival on Friday 19th August at 20:00 in the Main Theatre in what is billed as The 'Dickson Minto' Event. Tickets are £8.00. Iain is reading in the **Imprisoned Writers** stream earlier that day 17:30 in a free event (pick up tickets on the day). The theme on the 19th is 'Resistance and Opposition'. More details at the website: <http://www.edbookfest.co.uk/>

Publication News

The US edition of *The Algebraist* is still on course for its September publication by Night Shade Books. The cover was unveiled in late July sporting a 'Hugo Nominee' tag, and a good SF "squids in space" illustration that could be young Dwellers. No details of the 'extras' that are planned for the signed limited edition yet. Meanwhile, an unabridged reading of *The Algebraist* has been recorded by Geoffrey Annis and was released by W F Howes in April 2005. ISBN: 1845053079.

Banks's Next Book

Currently listed for publication in September 2006, by Little, Brown, so a non 'M', he is currently in the planning stages of his next book, and should start writing in October with the first draft hopefully finished by Christmas. A short article by Will Lyons in **Scotland on Sunday** (31/07/05) noted that "the book will signal a departure from the easy, enjoyable style of his previous two thrillers", and quoted Iain as saying it "will be more surreal and not entirely based on our reality" and "I am hoping it will be much more complicated, like my earlier work: *The Bridge* or *Walking On Glass*."

Media Scanner

KJ Parker was asked in a recent interview with **SF Crownsnest**, “Do you have any particular favourite authors who have influenced your work?” Part of his response was: “I don’t much enjoy reading Iain M. Banks, simply because his world-view and mine don’t coincide much; but I’ve learned an enormous amount from his masterful use of structure and language.”

Source: <http://www.computercrownsnest.com>

The Independent publishes top ten book charts every Friday. On 27th May 2005 they instigated a new chart devoted to “Food and Drink” in order to remove these from the general Non-Fiction chart. *Raw Spirit*, the Arrow paperback edition, was at #5 in the first listing of this type.

The Sunday Times (05/06/05) commented in a profile of Charles Stross that he could “join the ranks of Iain Banks and JG Ballard as a writer who commands mainstream respect as well as a cult following” if he won this year’s Hugo.

The current standings in the vote for the Best Scottish Book of All Time were discussed in **The Daily Mail** (09/06/05) with *Sunset Song* by Lewis Grassic Gibbon in first place ahead of *Game of Kings* by Dorothy Dunnett. Modern favourites such as *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh at #5 and *The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks at #8 lagged behind these and others with the rest of the top ten being: #3 *Lanark* by Alasdair Gray; #4 *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* by James Hogg; #6 *An Oidhche Mus Do Sheol Sinn* by Aonghas Pdraig Caimbeul; #7 *Silver Darlings* by Neil Gunn; #9 *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark; and #10 *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson. Voting continues until August 25th, and can be cast via text message, by sending the word VOTE and the name of the book to 81800, or via The List’s website, <http://www.list.co.uk> The result will be announced at the Edinburgh International Book Festival two days after the vote closes.

On June 21st Iain appeared at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh in ‘Fascist Disneyland: Letters from Burma’. This event marked the sixtieth birthday of the Nobel

Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi who is currently living under house arrest. Iain read from her letters along with author Liz Lohead and MSP Sarah Boyack.

Iain’s appearance as an approximately monthly album reviewer on the weekly BBC 6Music radio show *Rocket Science* hosted by Marc Riley on 9th July was delayed by a few minutes owing to technical difficulties with the telecommunication link between the two men. Thus the usual pre-review banter in which Iain updates us on his health, how his flying lessons are going, and how he hasn’t started the next book yet was skipped and they went straight to the record reviewing.

The Times (09/07/05) featured some “Lit tips” from authors. Iain Banks contribution was “To plagiarise the late Peter Cook (so there’s one implied tip already), it’s all about the three P’s: practise, practise, practise. Writing is like everything else; the more you do it, the better you get.”

It was reported in **The Guardian** (22/07/05) that the poster advertisements for *The Algebraist* had attracted a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority. The posters, which appeared in the London Underground amongst other places, carried a quote from the review by Justina Robson in **The Guardian** (23/10/04), which said that the book was “a perfect place to have your mind blown to smithereens”. The ASA spokesman was saying, “Given the recent attacks on the Tube they [the complainer] felt this was not appropriate, so we are in the process of looking at this to see if action needs to be taken.”

On April 5th Banks was a member of a panel at the Edinburgh Science Festival with the scientists Bob Kibble and Ron Wheelton, and the writer Andrew Wilson, which discussed the film *Dr Strangelove*. According to the programme the film was chosen as it “addresses the relationship between scientists, the military and the government”.

The Edinburgh **Evening News** reported (27/07/05) that Iain will appear on the BBC TV quiz show *Mastermind*. His specialist subject is whisky and the programme is due for broadcast in December. Apparently the

producers were surprised he didn't choose a "space travel related topic".

Banks's 'Cultural Life' was explored in an interview with Charlotte Cripps in **The Independent** (29/07/05). He said that the last "proper novel" he read was *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell and was "very impressed" by it. He had started *Tristram Shandy*, but "put it aside because foolishly I agreed to go on Celebrity Mastermind and I have to swot up on whisky". He is also reading "a whole sequence of books on how to be a proper pilot". Turning to music he revealed that he has "19,682 iTunes on my computer", and his tastes are wide ranging with name checks for: The Arcade Fire; Melissa auf der Maur; Led Zeppelin and "Haydn and Bach, especially when it is played by Glenn Gould on piano". Iain prefers watching DVDs at home to going to the cinema and has recently watched: *The Seventh Seal*; *Ran*; *Metropolis*; *Festen* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Iain admitted that "Usually I avoid theatre and opera like the plague", but he did see *The Barber of Seville* at the Buxton Festival where he was also a guest.

The Algebraist UK Paperback Tour

A short tour was undertaken to promote the UK publication of the paperback edition of *The Algebraist* on July 4th.

The tour kicked off in Edinburgh on July 7th with an event at the Pleasance Cabaret bar organised by Blackwells. The same day saw an interview in **The Scotsman** with Liam Rudden in which Banks discussed the differences in plot plausibility that his two genres of work allow him to play with. In particular he noted that the fact that he writes far future science fiction makes it easy for him, although he admits that there are still rules: "It's a delicate line. What you are trying to do is keep the 'gee, gosh, wow' element without the reader going 'that's just stupid'. One way of doing that is by having a degree of consistency. Don't just make up laws and then trample all over them willy nilly because it happens to suit the plot. That's what gives cohesion to the whole thing."

Iain turned up next at the monthly SF reading at Borders in Oxford Street along with Kate Elliot and Tricia Sullivan, which took place on July 11th. A report posted on Live Journal said that Iain was on good form. See: <http://www.livejournal.com/users/chilperic/5386.html>

This was followed the next day by a lunchtime signing at Forbidden Planet in Shaftsbury Avenue. Heading even further south Iain popped up in Hove at an evening event at City Books on the 14th before returning to Scotland for an evening do at Borders on Buchanan Street in Glasgow on the 15th. A brief report from this event posted in the forum at www.iainbanks.net mentioned that when asked how he did research into the extra-terrestrial life-forms that he had written about Iain answered that he had a spaceship in his back garden and went off personally to check it all out before he wrote.

The book made it to the top of the UK SF charts with **The Book Standard** reporting (14/07/05) that data from Nielsen BookScan for the week ending July 9th had *The Algebraist* leading a top five that also comprised H.G. Wells with *War of the Worlds*, Robin Hobb with his latest, *Shaman's Crossing* and a couple of Doctor Who tie-ins.

The **Evening Standard** (18/07/05) ran a short (just over a hundred words) review of the book in which Catherine Shoard heaped praise on the inventiveness that went into the creation of the character Luseferous commenting that "It is rare to find a really good baddie". After a brief name check of the main protagonist and a mention of Uncle Slovius she commented, "It's madly ambitious and complicated", adding that it was "absolutely exhausting to read" and "the fact that someone actually managed to write it is almost unthinkable".

The next leg of the tour began with a morning appearance at the Buxton Festival in the Opera House on Wednesday 20th July, with it winding up in the Eastern region of England and appearances in Cambridge, Chelmsford and Milton Keynes on the 25th, 26th and 27th respectively. The Cambridge event has a report all of its own on page # 6.

The Player of Games

Banks's second SF novel was first written back in 1979, and apparently came close to being published in its original form. It did not see print until a reworked version was issued by Macmillan in August 1988. If it had seen the light of day in its original form then Iain may well have not gone onto write *The Wasp Factory* and so the course of his career would be been very different.

The Macmillan hardback edition had a cover by Richard Hopkinson. A signed, numbered, slip-cased, limited edition of 201 books that retailed at £75 was also produced. The 1989 paperback edition was published by Futura, and a second UK paperback edition with the Mark Salwowski cover followed from Orbit in 1992, and just last month this was re-launched with a new cover. The story of the dedication to Jim (in the hardback), to James S Brown (in the paperback), is told in *Raw Spirit*, pages 188-190.

In terms worldwide exposure the book appeared in the US, from St Martin's Press, the year after its UK publication, and editions have appeared (or should be forthcoming) in: Italian, German, Danish, Spanish, French, Finnish, Estonian, Japanese, Polish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Russian and Czech.

According to an interview Banks gave to Adam Rosser¹, Gollancz was the publisher that went to the trouble of having two reader's reports on the book before they ultimately rejected it. Iain admitted that "It would not have been as good a book, definitely, if it had been published then", and went on to reveal that it was his Macmillan editor, James Hale, who had said that the first draft was lacking in terms of Gurgeh's motivation which was originally just boredom. When Banks revisited the book he added the Special Circumstances sting operation that allowed them to blackmail the protagonist into working for them, and also to add the surprise ending to the book.

An earlier interview with Tim Metcalfe² had seen Banks comment that "in the first draft he

was more boring ... in the second draft he's much more dynamic and forceful". In comparing the 1979 and 1988 versions he said "the story is roughly the same - it's expanded and drastically rewritten", admitting "the finished book is about ten times better". That first draft Banks divulged to Isobel Murray³, was written in seventeen days of work over a three week period, whilst he claims to have going out and getting drunk with his pals and (at other times I suspect) carrying his mum's shopping bag.

Critical reaction at the time was very positive. Helen McNabb⁴ opened her review with "This is a good book. Read it", going on to praise it as a "well paced, cleverly plotted, imaginative, original and beautifully written story." Tom Hutchinson in **The Times** (24/09/88) putting Banks's second science fiction novel in the company of Arthur C Clarke's, *Cradle*; Nikolai Tolstoy's, *The Coming of the King* and William Gibson's, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. He commented "a fantasy-skewed narrative so taken for granted it becomes communicatively acceptable and credible to us, as in this story of the great game-player who takes on a match that burrows through time and space in its own philosophy". The review concludes with single word sentence, "Tremendous".

In Interzone (#26) John Clute considered *The Player of Games* as a "vast improvement", but goes on to comment that the names of the people, drones and places, "reminds one of fanzine humour at its most manically tedious". Once Gurgeh is on his mission Clute considers the book "swift, surefooted, pell-mell, and glows with a benign luxuriance."

The Player of Games is set seven hundred years after the events of *Consider Phlebas*. The internal workings of The Culture are more exposed in this work than its predecessor in which an outsider is used to examine the interventions. However, Gurgeh, is not an average Culture citizen, with his competitive edge perhaps making him more like those reading about him than his peers. Banks admitted as much in the GM interview²

¹ Science Fiction World, #3, August 2000.

² GM Magazine, vol.2, no.3, November 1989.

³ Scottish Writers Talking 2, ISBN: 1862322805.

⁴ Paperback Inferno, #83, April/May 1990.

“Here, it's admired, people would say 'Wow, he's got great ambition'. In the Culture they'd say 'Hmmm, bit funny'.” The minds and drones come further to the fore and this is why some critics have labelled Banks's humanoids as being playthings for his AIs.

The evil empire of Azad that The Culture has decided needs to be checked uses a complicated game to establish a hierarchy, with the ultimate winner of the game becoming Emperor until the next series of games. To emphasise the close interlinking between the game and the society, the two have the same name. Race Mathews⁵ in his commentary drew the analogy of The Culture with the UN, or one, or a group of, the developed nations, whilst comparing Azad to Somalia, Zaire or the former Yugoslavia. He concluded his discussion saying that Banks raised serious issues whilst entertaining us, and that “he encourages us to care and think”, and that this “sets him apart decisively from science-fiction practitioners of lesser stature”.

David Garnett⁶ back in 1989, asked Banks about his own game playing activities. Iain replied that he was fascinated by the “idea of games” but probably doesn't “play as many as you might think from reading the books”. Admitting that he used to make up games that were “usually incredibly complicated ... if not unplayable, then unmarketable” he likened the process to writing a novel in terms of the ultimate satisfaction derived.

Ultimately, as the Science Fiction World¹ annotated bibliography notes the book is a story of manipulation. Gurgeh being manipulated into helping the Culture manipulate the Azad civilisation. Michael Colby⁷ picked out the morality of the story when he asked Iain about it, who commented that the Azad society “can't stand innocence” continuing to explain that “they're obsessed with sex, as we are ... it's about power, domination, sexuality”. Whatever your take on the book it was another major step forward in Banks's SF career.

⁵ Iain M Banks: The ‘Culture’ Science Fiction Novels and the economics and politics of scarcity and abundance in *Metaphysical Review* #28, 1996.

⁶ *Journal Wired* #1, Winter 1989.

⁷ *Science Fiction Eye*, vol.2, no.1, February 1990.

The Unwritten Banks

The Player of Games is actually the Iain M. Banks book that has come closest to being made into a film. The **Guardian** (20/05/1997) reported that an option to the book had been sold to Pathe-Guild. At his recent talk in Cambridge Iain commented that the rights had been sold for a not inconsiderable sum, and he made the point that he was not just talking about an option.

Unfortunately the particular executive who championed the project, Alexis Lloyd, stepped down as Managing Director of Pathe Pictures after the 2000 Cannes film festival. Lloyd's replacement was not so enthusiastic about it, and so the project was allowed to die and the development costs up to then written off.

It seems that part of these costs have been met by the UK National Lottery players. The film received £50,000 from the funding organisation created in 1997 that was to distribute just under £100 million of lottery money earmarked for UK film development. The **Guardian** (25/10/02) surveyed the results of the project in which three companies had been chosen to act as franchises. Pathe delivered 15 of the 35 films they promised to make, with DNA making 5 of 16 and the Film Consortium 16 of 30.

Whilst it was in production there were the inevitable rumours about the potential involvement of whoever was considered particularly hot property at the time. Luc Besson, off the back of his success with *The Fifth Element* and presumably also the French connection with Pathe, was apparently in the frame to direct according to Phil Daoust's **Guardian** article (20/05/1997). Issue #6 of the fanzine, **The Culture**, reported that Jonathon Gems, writer of *Mars Attacks!* was a possible choice as screenwriter.

Most of Banks's other SF works have been optioned at some point in the past but never got as far along the production line as *The Player of Games* did. Iain has been quoted as saying that he would be happy for any of the books to be changed, i.e. have happy endings as long as they got the spaceships right.

Banks on the Cam

The Algebraist Tour Stops in Cambridge

Iain did a reading, QA and signing session at the Heffers in the Grafton Centre on Monday 25th July 2005. The bookshop had received their delivery of the new editions of the 'M' backlist on the Saturday, and one of the staff commented that they thought they were the first to get them as it was especially for the Monday event.

Before he began his reading Iain did a bit of scene setting for the chosen passage, the Dweller 'party', which was almost halfway through the book. He also asked if there were any mathematicians in the audience who could tell him how to actually pronounce the title of the book, as he wasn't sure where the emphasis should be. The extract he read started with the armour throwing and finished with Hatherence's comment about applying for her posthumous decoration immediately. At the end he commented that it was "one of the less obscure passages".

The questions then came thick and fast for just over half an hour. In the middle of his reading Iain has stopped to describe the Dwellers as "giant vertically oriented Yo-Yos about nine metres across, a bit bloated and with spider crabs cemented to the outside that can swing around". The first questioner picked up on this and asked how he dreamt up the Dwellers and did he draw them? Banks commented that years and years ago as an adolescent he did draw aliens and spaceships but not nowadays. The Dwellers were going to have to live in a gas giant planet and their structure just came from thinking about the ecological niche that they could inhabit, and he made them big as they had such an enormous space in which to live. He commented that there are experts that writers can go to in order to make sure they get their science right but he regards this as cheating and said it was easier to make stuff up yourself.

The second questioner developed that theme in asking if it was important that he could visualise his books in order for the story to work. Iain replied that much of the SF furniture like starships didn't need explaining

anymore. When he read in his youth three pages of explanation about how a particular star drive worked he got bored and thankfully SF writers "do not do that much anymore". He said that the intense parts of the story he saw in 'movie mode' in his head but the amount he 'saw' varied from book to book.

A question on the process of writing, about characters and if he based them on real people, produced an odd analogy. Iain initially answered "No, not really" and then elaborated. He says it is a writing class fallacy that you should only 'write only what you know'. It is an approach that works but not for all, and is not the be all and end all of writing. If it was the ONLY way then we wouldn't have any SF. Of course, he admitted that all ideas have a basis in real life, but he has a 'food processor' concept of how these ideas then get into novels. You take raw emotion and raw characters and put them in the food processor. The difference between writers is how much they use the processor. Some writers just use "pulses of imagination" to blend their ingredients leaving large chunks recognisable. Banks himself holds the button down for three minutes until the original pieces are very, very small and in most cases unrecognisable. Having said that he then mentioned that the scar on the neck of one of his characters came directly from a girl he used to go out with. The most beautiful girl he ever went out with - so beautiful that the scar was beautiful. He felt so bad about using that feature that he made the rest of the characteristics very different from the source person. Rounding off his reply with a joke he said that the reason that he did all this was so that he didn't get "biffed on the nose" at parties by people claiming his characters were based on themselves and taking exception.

The filming of *The Wasp Factory* was brought up, and Iain briefly recounted the story (covered in **Banksoniains** #1 and #2). He also commented that when he worked as a costs clerk for a firm of lawyers in London one of their clients had been a film production company and so he was aware of how the industry worked and that the strike rate was about one script out of twenty optioned made it to the screen. Despite having no illusions about the film industry he still had them

shattered by his experience with *The Wasp Factory*, i.e. seeing a screenplay that re-located the story to America, having to go to court over the rights etc.

Iain was then asked about the difference in describing invented worlds as opposed to the real world in novels. He said that the real world was probably easier but that as there were more people doing it then you had to work in more flourishes. He said he was more at home with SF and that it was generally a matter of confidence and as long as you were internally consistent and had convincing details you could take the reader along with you. He then compared mainstream to a piano and SF to a Cathedral organ. The piano with 88 keys and 3 pedals is very versatile and allows for great expression. The Cathedral organ has multiple keyboards, even one for your feet, and all sorts of stops, "all the better for the pulling out of", and is not as subtle as the piano but makes a great noise.

The next question was about SF films and Iain's reply has been included in the article on page #5. He was also then asked if The Culture just turned up in his SF work. Iain replied that because of his planning he knew which SF books were Culture and which were not very early on. They were never going to appear in *The Algebraist*.

A particularly interesting question was posed about how much effort Banks's puts into manipulating the reader and when in the writing process. Iain's first comment was that it must be a good question, as he had "no quick glib reply". He said he plans very thoroughly and does not write the 'romantic' way which is to picture a scene and go on from there with planning considered cheating. He says he feels cheated if books just suddenly stop. He likened his writing to the development of neural pathways in a child's brain. He has various plot strands in his head, and as he thinks about the book they interlink and use reinforces some of them whilst others fade away. Having said all that, he then commented that the twist in *The Wasp Factory* came right at the end of the planning phase with basically the whole thing planned out before he thought of the final possibility

of the twist. He then went back and put some clues into the rest of his plan and wrote the book.

A technical question about his writing saw Iain asked how many drafts he went through. In the bad old days he said only one. He used to send off first drafts. In the age of typewriters he did comment that he generally thought up a whole sentence before committing it to the page. His naïve hope was that whoever read the manuscript at the publishers he sent it to would spot the raw talent. *The Wasp Factory* was the first book he ever did a second draft of. Nowadays with word processors it is a different matter. He generally edits in the morning what he wrote the day before, and when he has finished the book edits it again. This draft gets sent off to his agent and he continues tinkering. His publishers eventually get a draft and give comments and these get incorporated (or not). He made the analogy of software version numbers, commenting that it was probably version 2.4 or 3.2 that was the published edition of one of his books, but never 7.1.

Digressing a little he said that he usually overwrites and has to take stuff out. When James Hale was editing his SF work he used to be able to get away with more by claiming about passages that James commented on "oh, that's how SF works". However, on one occasion James replaced a page and a half of Iain's work with "they tied him to the gantry".

The final question concerned The Culture with Iain being asked if he did anything special to maintain consistency through the series. Banks says he remembers them pretty well, but did admit to getting his drone aura colours mixed up at some point. He then asked the questioner if he had spotted an inconsistency and said Good when this produced the reply "No".

Afterwards I got a few books signed including my Russian edition of *The Bridge*. He immediately said "Ah a Russian one" when he saw it, and commented that he should really sign in Cyrillic, but looking at what his name looked like he said it wouldn't really flow, adding that he once signed a book in Japanese but that took about ten minutes.

Banks in Translation

Y Viva España

La Factoría de Ideas has brought the Spanish/World rights to *The Algebraist*, which means that they can sell to the Spanish speaking parts of Latin and South America as well as in Spain itself. The same company has already published *Excesión* (Excession) in 2004, followed by *El Artefakto* (Feersum Endjinn) in March 2005. Both of these have used the Mark Salwowski cover artwork, and were translated by Manuel Mata Álvarez. The company also has the rights to *Against a Dark Background*, *Inversions* and *Look to Windward*, so Manuel looks as if he could be busy for the foreseeable future.

The first of Banks's works to be made available in Spanish, like in so many languages, was *La Fábrica de Avispas* (The Wasp Factory), which was translated by Gustavo Pérez de Ayala and published by Euler in 1987. *Pasos sobre Cristal* (Walking on Glass) followed in 1989 from Serbal, which was translated by Jorge Lech Polianski. 1991 saw a new set of publishers producing Spanish editions of Banks's works. Alcor added *El Puente* (The Bridge) to their 'Narrativa Fantástica' range translated by Luis Murillo, whilst Martínez Roca began on The Culture works translated by Albert Solé with *Pensad en Flebas* (Consider Phlebas) and *El Uso de las Armas* (Use of Weapons) out that year and *El Jugador* (The Player of Games) following the year after before there was another hiatus.

In the late 1990s Mondadori began to publish the non-M works. They started with *Cómplice* (Complicity) in 1998, translated by Cristóbal Pera, with *La Fábrica de Las Avispas* (The Wasp Factory) and *Una Canción de Piedra* (A Song of Story) the next year. A new translator, Juiz Cruz Rodríguez was then employed for *El Negocio* (The Business) 2002 and *Aire Muerto* (Dead Air) 2004.

Currently a dozen Banks titles have been available in Spanish and with the rights to rest of his SF back catalogue (except *The State of the Art*) sold Spanish readers have a fair amount to look forward to.

New Covers

In the UK the big publication story other than *The Algebraist* paperback release (see page # 3) is the SF back catalogue makeover that has just taken place and brings them into line with the non M work which had its makeover to coincide with the UK paperback release of *Dead Air*.

The credits for the covers (in small print at the bottom of the back cover) just give a URL, www.blacksheep-uk.com. Blacksheep is a London based design agency that seems to specialise in what they term "publishing design" - book covers and DVD packaging from what they showcase on their website - as well as undertaking corporate and marketing design work as well. Incidentally three cover designs that did not ultimately make the bookshop shelves can be found on their website.

In general the new covers are un-skiffy, apart from *Excession* that has a small illustration of a spaceship. *Feersum Endjinn* initially looked to me like it might be a deep space image of the kind produced by the Hubble telescope but the picture credits call the image 'Ice'. The Staberinde on the cover of *Use of Weapons* could easily mark the book out as a war novel. There are stars at the top of most of the designs which cannot be described as prominent, but do seem to feature more than the night sky should in each illustration and so gives them something of an un-earthly feel.

There is also linkage with the predecessor of each book in that the underlying colour is the same. Thus the green of *Inversions* and the yellow of *Look to Windward* are also the dominant colours in the new designs.

We hope to interrogate the Art Director at Time Warner about the whys and wherefores of the makeover for a more in depth article for the next issue.

In my mind the jury is still out especially given the stark contrast offered by overtly SF Night Shade Books cover design for *The Algebraist* noted on page #1.