

The Banksoniain #9

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

February 2006

Editorial

You wait for your favourite author to pop up on a celebrity quiz show and then three come along at once! This issue features more than a few pages about quiz shows as we round up Iain's television appearances over the New Year period in glorious technicolor, delve further into Pat Gibson's Mastermind triumph, and give you the chance to test your knowledge of whisky against the man himself.

The latest news on the new book is in the adjoining column so what are you still doing reading this paragraph?

In the meantime a special Banks manuscript was auctioned for charity, and with his generous permission we have the text to share with you. Waiting for the report from the auction is my excuse for being slightly later than normal with this issue, and I am sticking to it.

This issue's featured book is *Use of Weapons*, and we also take this opportunity to look at Iain's longstanding friendship with Ken MacLeod who was instrumental in shepherding the work into publication.

Next issue will feature *The Crow Road*, as well as all the Banks related news we can get hold of. A reminder that you can email any corrections, comments, suggestions and/or **contributions** to: banksoniain@gmail.com
More contributions will mean less time waiting for the next issue.

Thanks to Lucy for this issue's musical accompaniment, to Jim for the transcript of the Mastermind questions, to Pat Gibson for his input, and, of course, to Iain (M) Banks, especially for providing the first sentence of his new novel for this issue, and permission to print the text of his Book Aid contribution.

Banks's Next Book

Iain is currently working on a book with the working title *Matter*. It is a little behind the original schedule but should be submitted in mid-March. At the moment, although it may not survive the editing process, the first sentence which reveals that Banks is playing his usual games with his readers is: Apparently I'm what is known in the trade as a an Unreliable Narrator, though let's face it, if you believe everything you're told, you're an idiot.

The delay may well see the advertised September publication date put back, possibly as far as into early 2007, although the Internet book selling sites have not changed their listing dates at time of writing.

TV News

Iain's next appearance should be on a BBC4 documentary about the history of UK SF. He is recording his 'talking head' piece in March.

Fan News

Some of the fans from the Iain Banks Forum are planning to meet up for a few drinks at some point during Eastercon in Glasgow in April 2006. Check out the "Off Topic Chat" Forum at <http://www.iainbanks.net> or drop us a line here if you want any more details.

Criticism News

Issue #108 of *Chapman Magazine* with a substantial (5000 word) article on Iain Banks should appear around March-April. UK advanced orders can be made with a £6.50 cheque (payable to Chapman) sent with a note of your address to Chapman, 4 Broughton Place, Edinburgh EH1 3RX, Scotland, UK

Media Scanner

A Not "THE" Iain Banks Update: Iain (Ashley) Banks the student of computer animation at the University of Teeside who was featured in issue #2 received his degree in a ceremony on Thursday November 24th 2005, as reported in the **Middlesbrough Evening Gazette** for that day.

The Mirror ran a competition (09/12/05) in which the prize was a box set of James Bond DVDs, and the multiple choice question was: "Who wrote the James Bond books. Was it (a) Iain Banks (b) Ian Fleming or (c) Ian Dury?"

The Scotsman (28/12/05) had a list of "20 Scottish books everyone should read" prepared by Emma Cowing in order to mark the fact that the Association for Scottish Literary Studies was showcasing Scottish literature at the annual Modern Languages Convention in Washington, D.C. Emma's list included *The Wasp Factory* with this comment: "Dark, detached and brilliant, Iain Banks' first novel remains his finest. Frank is a teenager on a remote Scottish island whose strange obsessions, and the varying degrees of insanity of his family members, become increasingly horrifying. Makes Stephen King look like Beatrix Potter."

A review of Tom Baker's book, *The Boy Who Kicked Pigs*, in **The Daily Telegraph** (31/12/05) by Isobel Shirlaw concluded with this interesting description: "Almost impossible to categorise, the story feels like a cross between a child's picture book and a comic novel. If you imagine Iain Banks's vile Wasp Factory narrated by Roald Dahl, but for an adult audience, then you are halfway there. Revolting but fun."

The Times (07/01/06) focussed on *The Crow Road* for its 'Bookgroup' article. Alyson Rudd wrote a gentle five hundred-word critique of the book. Rudd praised the handling of love and sex, and considered it "very enjoyable to read" despite the gimmick of switching back and forth between past and present. She concluded on the strength of the book that Iain "must be a really nice bloke", a view that was reinforced by his University Challenge appearances. Rudd's comments

were followed by comments from the newspaper's readers. These almost all picked out the portrayal of family relationships as the main strength of the book, but also expressed some dissatisfaction with the flashback structure.

One of the things that Rudd picked out in her comments was the first line of the book, and "It was the day my grandmother exploded" was at #49 in a LitLine listing of 100 Best First Lines from Novels. Top of the list was Melville's *Moby Dick* with "Call me Ishmael."

See: <http://www.litline.org/ABR/100bestfirstlines.html>

The Sunday Times (05/02/06) contacted writers across Scotland "in a bid to establish a canon of five home-grown books that every child should have read by the time he or she leaves school." Christopher Brookmyre included *The Wasp Factory* as his five.

The **Glasgow Herald** (08/02/06) reported on a Scottish island community that has raised £1.6m over the past 25 years to build a public pool. The Mull and Iona Swimming Pool Association now need another £100,000 in the next few months or they will lose a £375,000 EU grant. They have therefore cast their fundraising net wider and Richard Branson, Rick Stein, Robbie Coltrane, Bill Paterson and Iain Banks have donated items (auctioned on eBay) to support the campaign.

BankTechNews reported that when they were searching the Internet for Banks amongst the hits were "British science fiction novelist Iain Banks".

The press coverage of the sale of TimeWarner Books to Hachette Livre (part of Lagardere) saw Iain Banks listed as one of the premier Time Warner authors, e.g. **The Daily Telegraph** (11/02/06). The price was \$537.5 million (c. £300 million).

The Advertising Standards Authority did not uphold the couple of complaints they received about the wording of the poster advertising the paperback edition of *The Algebraist* (see issue #7). No formal adjudication was published but they did comment, "It was felt that whilst the timing of the posters was unfortunate, there was no intention to cause offence"

Mastermind Revisited

Pat Gibson wrote to say how much he enjoyed the article in the last issue about his appearance on Mastermind with 'The Culture Novels of Iain M Banks' as a specialist subject. His main reason for contacting **The Banksoniain** was to correct the score that he obtained in the general knowledge round which was 19 and not 17 as was erroneously stated in issue #8. He also gave us a wealth of background material as to why he chose that subject and how he prepared so here we revisit the subject with information straight from the horse's mouth.

After Pat was accepted onto Mastermind he worked on a strategy for the whole competition knowing he would need three specialist subjects and wanted to save Father Ted for the final and so needed two others. He picked the Culture novels "simply because I recalled reading a few in the past from the library and remembered that I had never abandoned any of them half-way through - a very good recommendation I thought."

In the event there were times when he thought he had bitten off more than he could chew, "although I enjoyed my immersion in the books greatly (I went a very, very long way beyond overkill), I felt it was an extremely testing subject to prepare for and in the darkest hour (May 2005) I actually worried that it had been an unwise choice." As he continued, "the scope of the material is well defined - 7 books - something like 2,700 pages of text" and it is very "self-contained with just a few obvious external references".

There were two main reasons that he found it such a challenge. Firstly "the sheer volume of detail that Banks creates: the Ships (100+ painstakingly catalogued), the Creatures, the Plants"; and secondly "his liking for assigning characters/ships idiosyncratic or multi-part names which are close to impossible to memorise/pronounce." Luckily he says, "the saving graces are his imagination and his great story-telling ability."

Pat comments that his favourite Culture novels are *Excession* and *Inversions* so he was disappointed that his only mistake in the specialist round came from the latter book.

The question was - What, according to Dr. Vossil, is the only sin? "I should have got it right easily but I remember that the answer simply did not come instantly for whatever reason and then I realised that there was silence - neither the audience, John Humphreys nor I were making any sound - unacceptable! (My entire Mastermind strategy had consisted of two imperatives 'Do Not Pass / Answer Instantly') I remembered the key word started with 'S' so I barked out an emergency 'Stupidity' - Wrong!"

In his chat with the quizmaster before starting the general knowledge round Pat expected an ironic question about Matriapoll's dislike for TV Quiz shows - "prizes too big and questions too easy" - but it was not to be.

Pat suspects that for the period of about 10 days preceding and including the semi-final he may have been as well informed as anyone has ever been on the Culture books. Now he says "some of the harder expertise is now draining away, although I could refresh reasonably quickly if needed at some future date - perhaps it might become an Olympic event!"

Since the appearance he has allowed himself what he says was "the considerable pleasure of reading *The Algebraist*", as "I couldn't have risked reading it before the semi - It could only have confused me. It gave me a shock when it first surfaced in a local shop - cue frantic 'flicking through' to confirm it wasn't 'Culture' and therefore was outside my remit." Pat thinks Iain "displayed enormous and admirable confidence" in writing this book not relying on the Culture brand and producing "from scratch a very good book".

When another Culture novel does appear Pat says he will be ready and waiting, until then he will have to keep on reading **The Banksoniain**, although he has now started on the Iain Banks novels. He also reads the Iain Banks Forum via <http://www.iainbanks.net> and found his performance described there as 'either impressive or waaaaaay geeky...' and said, "I think I would happily take either component of the quote as a compliment".

Meanwhile Iain mentioned that he thought Pat's performance was "amazing".

Banks on Mastermind

Not to be considered just as subject matter, Banks turned up as a contestant himself on the edition of Celebrity Mastermind shown on BBC1 on January 2. Presumably banned from using his own books as a specialist subject (although by his own admission he would not have done as well as Pat Gibson) he turned to his love of the water of life and answered questions on 'Malt Whisky and the Distilleries of Scotland'.

Gerard Gilbert, writing the 'Guide To Today's Must-See TV' in **The Independent** that day noted that whilst Sid Wadell tackled the history of rock'n'roll 1955-1965, Mylene Klass chose Sex and the City (Series 3). "Just the third series, note." he commented. Christopher Howse also mentioned this in his review in the **Daily Telegraph** (07/01/06) pointing out that it is just 18 episodes of a TV series [the DVD has a running time of 514 minutes]. He went on to describe Alistair McGowan's subject choice of Erik Satie [the composer] as "a proper subject" and then Iain Banks as a "proper writer" who "did all right on malt whisky".



After the first (specialist subject) round the positions were:

Klass	17	(0)	[18]
Banks	12	(0)	[17]
McGowan	10	(4)	[17]
Wadell	7	(5)	[18]

In the brackets is the number of times the contestant said pass to a question. In the event of a tie the lower number of passes

wins. In the square brackets is the number of questions that were asked. Apparently the question setters go to a great deal of trouble to make the different sets of questions have the same average read time. The contestant is also not supposed to interrupt, and if they do the quizmaster, currently John Humphries, reads to the end anyway. This happened to Sid Wadell a number of times.

When the contestant comes back for their second round, which is done in reverse order so that the leader after the first round goes last and has the advantage of knowing what they need to get to win, there is a short bit of banter with the quizmaster. Iain was asked if he was a 'whisky snob', and although initially disagreeing eventually conceded that as he generally only drinks single malts then he probably is. He was then asked about the difference of writing with an 'M' in his name, and in answering made an analogy of being a carpenter in that using exactly the same tools you can make a chair and the next day a table.

After the general knowledge round, which was not a happy one for Ms Klass, the final results were:

Banks	26	(2 passes)
McGowan	21	(5 passes)
Klass	18	(6 passes)
Wadell	18	(9 passes)

Iain was awarded with the trophy (see picture below) and got to sit in the Mastermind chair again whilst the credits rolled. Iain has given the trophy to his mother who has put it on a window ledge where, he says, "it catches the light and is hard for visitors to miss".



University Challenge

Iain appeared on the quiz show University Challenge in a special edition on Sunday January 1st at 20:30 on BBC2. He was a member of the team of writers along with Jimmy McGovern, Andrew Davies and Tony Marchant who are better known for their television rather than novel writing. They took on a team of actors consisting of Janet Suzman, Robert Powell, Martin Jarvis and Samuel West.

Iain as team captain was asked in an interview filmed up in Scotland about his fellow team members. He mentioned that Andrew Davies had said he was not that good at history. **The Mirror** (03/01/06) picked up on this pointing out that Davies was “the screenwriter/ adaptor of *Pride & Prejudice*, *Bleak House*, *Dr Zhivago*, *Boudica*, *Wives & Daughters*, *Vanity Fair*, *Moll Flanders*, *Middlemarch*, *The Legend Of King Arthur*, etc. Perhaps the newspaper could do with being reminded of the difference between fact and fiction?

As far as Iain is aware none of his teammates were consulted as to who should be captain, the programme makers just appointed him. The way the game works it did mean that Iain had a central role in that the bonus question answers have to go through the captain, but he also lead from the front as well.



Banks leads the fight back.

Five minutes or so into the quiz the writers were on minus five (having made an incorrect interruption) and the actors were on 55. Iain's light is on as he has just pressed the button to

correctly identifying a quote from the film *Dr Strangelove* (for which he gave the full title). The writers then got on a roll and by the end were comfortably ahead by 185 to 105.

That was not the end of the fun. It turned out to be a mini-tournament with the writers taking on the News team that had easily beaten the MPs in their first round match that was broadcast the day before. This team was made up of Kate Adie, Nick Robinson, Michael Buerk and Bridget Kendall. In the final it was about even until just before halfway into the contest, but the writers dominated the second half, and eventually came out as comprehensive winners 190 - 45. Nick Robinson in his blog said that he was very embarrassed by the performance.



Just before the final whistle (in the final).

There seemed to be no trophy awarded for this celebrity tournament, just kudos.

Andrew Davies wrote an article in **The Mail on Sunday** (01/01/06) that revealed that all three episodes had been recorded on the same day so the actors had seen the MPs lose to the News team before their recording. After the writers victory there was a short break before the final during which Michael Buerk plied them with red wine whilst not letting his own team drink any alcohol.

The rest of the article was about how the MPs argued amongst themselves and with Paxman, and bemoaning the speed of his own memory and buzzer figure, but he did give a closing tip for those who may be on the show in the future which was: “get Iain Banks on your team”.

Use of Weapons

Published in 1990 as the third Iain M Banks novel *Use of Weapons* was first written in 1974 whilst Banks was still at University. Thus it was the literary birthplace of *The Culture*, and the back-story originally developed for this novel has flavoured the majority of his SF work. As usual the centrespread article gives the background to a Banks novel, the reaction of reviewers, and picks out some of the themes that commentators have seen in the book along with Iain's own comments, so that interested readers can compare their understanding with that of others, and hopefully re-read the story and get more out of it.

The two books written before *Use of Weapons* will never see the light of day, thus it is the earliest fully developed Banks storyline to make it into print. That original mid 1970s draft, he admits, was "impossible to comprehend without thinking in six dimensions"¹, and it took prompting for him to return to the work and substantially modify it for publication in a rewrite that took place over a couple of months during the summer of 1989². However, he still confessed to David Howe a couple of years later, "I don't think it's a particularly easy read"³.

It was Ken MacLeod, one of Iain's old school friends who suggested a reworking of the narrative structure. Ken had initially read the work when it was fresh off the typewriter, and then asked to read it again after *The Wasp Factory* was published. The dedication for *Use of Weapons* reads, "I blame Ken MacLeod for the whole thing. It was his idea to argue the old warrior out of retirement, and he suggested the fitness programme, too." Ken, of course, has gone on to become an award winning SF author himself. (See page #8 for more about Ken and Iain).

The substance of that 'fitness programme' was that the dénouement was put at the end, not in the middle where Iain had originally put it in its chronological position, with the

¹ Interview with Nick Gevers, Science Fiction Weekly <http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue274/interview.html>

² Interview with Stan Nicholls, Wordsmiths of Wonder.

³ Interview with David Howe, Starburst #151.

intertwining two-plot stream structure being developed from the two halves that was necessarily anti-climatic. The overall result was that "there's a lot less purple prose, and more internal resonances. It's more complicated and deep."² Iain has claimed that he couldn't even read the book in its early form, and that there "were always two things going on per chapter and there were sixty-four chapters"⁴. He therefore put it aside as unsaveable, until Ken made his suggestions.

The structure of the novel was turned round so that there is one stream with advancing chapters indicated by ascending Arabic numerals and the other with descending chapters with Roman numerals. Colin Greenland describes them as "interpenetrating gyres"⁵ in his review emphasising the interconnection and eventual combination with a nod to Yeats. Those changes mean that Iain has likened the two drafts to that between a 2CV and a Ferrari, "they're both cars – but they're slightly different."⁶

Banks has also acknowledged MacLeod's input into the development of *The Culture* in general, through the chats that the two had in the pub³. *The Culture*, as Banks explained to David Garnett⁷, were "these galactic good guys who occasionally had to stoop to using this kind of person". That person being the character Cheradenine Zakalwe, who Banks was working his story around. "I wanted him to be working for the unarguably good guys so that the emphasis would be on his morality, not theirs."¹

The Culture developed from Zakalwe's back-story into what Garnett described as the "Galactic Cooperative"⁷, a phrase Iain readily agreed with, adding that it was also a reaction to the "sexist and imperialist" space opera from America he had read.

The prologue and epilogue of the story are pieces of poetry that frame the chapters of the two story streams. Sma's opening poem, *Slight Mechanical Destruction*, dates her recollection to 2090 AD. The book actually

⁴ Interview with Andrew Wilson, Scottish Book Collector, vol. 4, no. 9.

⁵ Review by Colin Greenland, Foundation #50.

⁶ Interview with Andy Sawyer, Vector #158.

⁷ Interview with David Garnett, Journal Wired #1.

says “Year 115 (Earth, Khmer calendar)” displaying Sma’s continuing fascination with Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge regime she encountered on visiting Earth in 1977, and also pointing to the theme of erasing the past and starting over.

Sma is a character already known to Banks’s readers through the novella *The State of the Art* (see issue #6). A further link is the mention of “that Petrain guy” to whom the novella is addressed and who also wrote the appendices for *Consider Phlebas*; “a sort of scholarly link between the books”³.

The closing poem is called *Zakalwe’s Song* and is written by his lover Shias Engin. She had promised to write one specifically about him, but the one cited is relegated to a volume of her complete works called ‘Juvenilia and Discarded Drafts’. When in 1987 *Consider Phlebas* was published Iain toyed with redeploing the title *Use of Weapons* for that book, and would have renamed this one after the epilogue poem⁸. The title has resonances on many levels within the story. Special Circumstances are using Zakalwe as a weapon; whilst he uses many different weapons, and anything in his hands can be as such, not just hardware, to achieve his employer’s goal. The reader’s goal is to understand Zakalwe. What is he really like? Who is responsible for him being that way?

The main part of the book between the poems is split into three named parts of nine chapters each, and consists of the alternating forwards and backwards storylines. The forward story is the tale of a particular job that Special Circumstances are undertaking using their operative Zakalwe and his control Dizet Sma. The backwards story tells us the story of Zakalwe forcing the reader to reassess their view of him as more and more background is revealed until the final twist, and his obsession with chairs is understood.

The first subsection is called ‘The Good Solider’ and reflects the initial plotline of getting Zakalwe back under Culture control and onto his next mission. A similar but simpler plot extricating Sma from her current

⁸ The Banksoniain, #4, p #6.

Contact operation and onto this new mission as well foreshadows this.

‘An Outing’ is the subtitle of the second section. This is where Zakalwe’s mission to bring a retired politician out of his library, and back to lead his people. A course of action deemed beneficial by the minds of The Culture, or so Zakalwe is lead to believe. The last of the main parts is ‘Remembrance’ which brings the forward and backwards stories ever closer until the climax of both is reached and the truth revealed.

Right at the end of the book we are brought full circle. Although ostensibly looking like the beginning of a new story, a preview of the opening chapter of a new book, *States of War*, this section was never intended to indicate a possible sequel. It shows Sma has moved on to find a new operative, and Zakalwe has returned to “old tricks” as Iain explained in a webchat⁹ when he was asked about the possibility of a follow-up.

Having said all that, it is, of course, possible to read the story as just another rollicking Banksian space opera with enormous ships (the GSV Size Isn’t Everything is over eighty kilometres long); sex, drugs and violence; sarcastic drones; eccentric Minds; the usual Culture paraphernalia and his trademark ‘widescreen Baroque’ set pieces.

John Clute’s review published in *Interzone*¹⁰ regards the whole of the forward story as a “maguffin”, declaring, “The true story ... is that of Cheradenine’s early years, and concerns the nature of the trauma which governs his actions.” Despite describing the maguffin as “poncing”, he concluded that the book was “the best tale of the Culture yet; and the most useful.”

Clute railed against Banks’s character “appalling names”, but Iain has claimed, “I work to make them sound plausible in the context of the future societies the characters live in.”¹¹ He continued, explaining how he gets into a “name-generating mode” of

⁹ Guardian Webchat:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/sciencefiction/story/0,,367256,00.html>

¹⁰ *Interzone* # 41

¹¹ *Starlog*, December 1994.

looking at the everyday things around him and extrapolating from them. “The trick is to stop thinking about the names of these things as entire words and just see the syllables involved.” Douglas Adams used a similar process with swearwords to create the character name Slartibartfast. Banks also revealed that he creates many names in one go so he has a supply ready and doesn’t get stuck during his writing when he needs a new name.

In his review⁵ Colin Greenland points out that “It will be literally impossible to read the book the same way a second time.” Whilst others have suggested reading the chapters in their chronological rather than physical order to enjoy a different reading experience.

Iain considers *Use of Weapons* to be the best of the M bunch, and has been quoted as considering it either his second or third best book all told, behind *The Bridge* and, depending on his feelings about it that day, *A Song of Stone*.¹²

The first foreign editions of *Use of Weapons* were the Italian, *La Guerra di Zakalwe*, and Spanish, *El Uso de las Armas*, both published in 1991. The next year saw the French, *L'Usage des Armes*, German, *Einsatz der Waffen*, and American publications. There was then a bit of a break before the Danish, *Lejesoldaten*, and Finnish, *Aseiden Käyttö*, editions appeared in 1996 and 1997 respectively. The most recent translations have been the Polish (1999), *Najemnik*, the Estonian (2001), *Relvade Kasutus*, and the Russian (2002), *Выбор оружия*, although the French and German editions have been reprinted in the last couple of years.

The book has not been the subject of a serious attempt to turn it into a film, but has inspired a song by a musician who goes under the name of ‘Wailing Miserere’ (a.k.a. Lucy) and describes herself as a “Singer/guitarist/pianist + flutey person”. Entitled ‘The Chair-Maker’ it can be streamed or downloaded from her website, and she welcomes comments, especially from readers of the book.

See: <http://wailingmiserere.dmusic.com>

¹² Abebooks Q&A <http://www.abebooks.co.uk/docs/Community/Featured/iainBanks.shtml>

When Iain Met Ken

As Ken MacLeod was so instrumental to the development of the book *Use of Weapons*, this issue is a good place to look at the relationship between the two men.

As mentioned already in this issue and earlier ones Iain and Ken were friends at school in Greenock. In a boxout to an interview with Jonathan Wright (**Dreamwatch** #85) Iain recalled that they met when Ken asked him to write something for the school magazine.

In the introduction that Iain wrote for the PS Publishing edition of Ken’s novella *The Human Front* he expanded on their time at school. He explained that they compared notes on the Science Fiction that they read, told each other the stories they were writing, and used each other as sounding boards.

Banks also discussed the different routes that the two took to becoming published writers. Iain with his million words in six novels over fourteen years, and Ken with his sensible degree, career and family and the acceptance of the first novel he wrote at the age of forty-two. Ken recounted to Andrew Adams in an interview¹³ the story of how Iain eventually persuaded his friend to take his writing seriously. At the launch party for *Canal Dreams* (which is dedicated to him) Ken found himself “being talked to earnestly by some female friend of Iain’s who told me how annoyed Iain was at me having all these books in my head and not writing them, and that I bloody well should write them”.

Ken had written an introduction to *Consider Phlebas* for the German translation. The English original of this was published in the book *The True Knowledge of Ken MacLeod*, a volume on Ken that also included an essay by James Brown called ‘Not Losing the Plot: Politics, Guilt and Storytelling in Banks and MacLeod’ that compares the two, and postulates that the entire Fall Revolution Quartet could be considered a response to *Use of Weapons*.

When Ken was editor of the school magazine, Iain didn’t get anything published in it.

¹³ Emerald City <http://www.emcit.com/emcitS01.shtml>

Book Aid International Fundraising Auction

On 21st February 2006 Bloomsbury Auctions held an auction in aid of Book Aid International. The majority of the items were specially produced handwritten works from a variety of authors including Iain Banks. All the authors were given the phrase 'between the lines' to inspire them.

The different author interpreted this in different ways. JK Rowling wrote a family tree of Sirius Black in which "there are many stories between the lines". Much of the pre auction publicity focussed on this item, along with the Blackadder sketch written by Richard Curtis and the piece from Sir Bob Geldof, which was about lines of cocaine. Other authors donating works included the likes of DBC Pierre (Booker Prize winner) and Julian Fellowes (Oscar winning screenwriter).

Book Aid International works to support reading and learning in some of the world's poorest countries. As they say on their website, "Education offers a route out of poverty and books are the foundation of lifelong learning, yet the majority of people in Africa cannot afford books of their own." There are many ways of helping Book Aid International. Their website gives information on book donations, money donations and membership of the 'Reverse Book Club'. See <http://www.bookaid.org>

The Banksoniain sent its 'London Society' correspondent along to the auction and he would have eaten more Quail's eggs, mini Smoked Salmon croissants and mini Yorkshire pudding stuffed with roast beef if he had not been to KFC on the way, although he says that he did manage a few glasses of Champagne.

He reports that a number of the featured authors were in attendance including Jacqueline Wilson and Frederick Forsyth, with Jeremy Paxman formally opening the evening's events before handing over to Sara Harrity from the charity, who explained more about their work. The expectant throng were then put into the hands of Rupert Powell, "a

man who proclaims with a hammer that he has picked your pocket with his tongue", said Mr Paxman, repeating the definition of an auctioneer from Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* that had been mentioned to him in the build up.

The Banks item was the second of the forty-four lots as the authors were handled in alphabetical order. The preceding item from Maya Angelou had opened at £50 and sold for £470. The auctioneer opened the Banks work at £100 with a bid from himself, declaring that he was a Banks collector. It then quickly rose to around the five hundred mark as two bidders went head to head. One of these dropped out, but a third entered the fray before it was finally sold at £980.

The next seven lots went for various prices in the range of four to seven hundred pounds, which was generally the price range that most items fell into, before the two-page Blackadder sketch, which had been chosen for special framing. This opened at £300 and with a keen telephone bidder eventually raised £1,650 (although on a per page basis this is less than the Banks). Another framed work, that of the artist Tracey Emin also eclipsed the Banks piece when it sold for £2,600, although the work was purely text her status as a sought after artist would have enhanced the desirability of the item.

Murder a very short play by Tom Stoppard went for £3,600 to the same bidder who paid £30,000 for the JK Rowling piece, and who had earlier won the Banks item. This turned out to be the mother of Daniel Radcliffe, the Harry Potter actor, bidding on his behalf.

Our correspondent toddled off into the night with his goodie bag, handily finding some chocolate to pass onto his wife, a potential Mother's Day present, and a book to read on the train home.

So there we have it. The Banks piece outsold such luminaries as Frederick Forsyth and Sir Bob Geldof, as well as Susanna Clarke who had beaten him to the Hugo. However, JK Rowling practically outsold everybody else put together with press reports the day after the event putting the total figure raised at £63,000, and garnering much publicity.

Between the Lines

The auction catalogue described Iain's contribution as "Using the phrase '*between the lines*', Iain Banks's intriguing and humorous piece tells us of the difficulties of beginning to write a story." There is no title above the text on the reproduction of the handwritten sheet in the catalogue, and below we have attempted to reproduce the structure of the text on the page. The word that is crossed out is done so with two lines making a cross of St Andrew, but in a way that still makes it easy to read. The work is copyright Iain Banks.

It was a dark and stormy night. ... Na, too radical. In the beginning ... bit overly completist, frankly. Let's see ... It is a truth universally acknowledged ... no no no – too many long words! Eh bien, mon prince, so Genoa ... not French, for goodness sake! Ah – I know: Stately, plump Buck Mulligan ... no, maybe not. When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End ... oh, spare me the alliteration.

Once upon a time, between the sheets
lines,

umm ...

We'll get back to this I think*

Iain Banks

* Don't bother – Ed.

Commentary

So here we have a short piece by Iain Banks written at the behest of a charity with the phrase 'between the lines' as inspiration. Iain has started off with that most clichéd of opening lines: "It was a dark and stormy night". This is the infamous first line of the 1830 novel, *Paul Clifford*, by Edward George Bulwer-Lytton. It has also been used as the title of a children's book by Allan Ahlberg, a Charles M Shultz Snoopy book, a Keith Moseley 'pop-up mystery whodunit', as well being slightly rehashed for the Morgan, D. Rosenberg work: *It Was a Dark, Stormy and Cliched Night...*

Banks's ironic comment is that this is "too radical".

The second opening line comes, of course, from the Bible with: "In the beginning". This is dismissed as being "overly completist". Banks's atheism is well known and he is also an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged" is the well-known opening to *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Iain has professed to being a fan of her work listing Jane along with the author of the next line he quoted in an interview with Andrew Wilson (Scottish Book Collector, March 1995). "Eh bien, mon prince, so Genoa" is how Leo Tolstoy begins his epic *War and Peace*.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* is the work that begins "Stately, plump Buck Mulligan", and "When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End" is, of course, the opening to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first book of JRR Tolkien's trilogy. Iain has stated that he will never write a trilogy.

1001 Books: You Must Read Before You Die

This new (published March 9th, ISBN: 1844034178) book from Cassell covers as the blurb says, "From *The Alchemist* to *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and Achebe to Zola", and is a sister to the same company's *1001 Movies*, and *1001 Albums* to see and hear respectively

The editor Peter Boxall gives each of the books chosen by an international team of writers and critics, a few hundred words of synopsis and commentary on each book.

The contingent of Banks books included are: *Complicity*, *The Crow Road*, *Dead Air*, *The Wasp Factory*, and *The Player of Games*. The online forum comments I have seen mainly speculated on why *Dead Air* is included rather than a work such as *The Bridge*. This also came through in a print review in **The Observer** (26/02/06) where Alex Clark commented that *Dead Air* was "a lazy book by a frequently lazy writer".

eBaywatch

A few interesting sets and items have been sold over the last quarter.

A set of the first ten Iain Banks first editions attracted just the one bid at the reserve price of £250 (plus another 10% for postage and packing). The lucky bidder getting a ready made collection in one fell swoop, but missing out on half the fun of book collecting.

A book of caricatures of Scottish authors with the title, *A Wheen o' Blethers*, sold for £19.50 with this particular example autographed by Banks and another six of his fellow subjects out of the forty in total. Lindsay Publications first published the book by David Gray in 2000. The description said it was “a fascinating biographical introduction” to the forty, with “tremendous high quality caricatures of each author”.

The Wasp Factory, as ever, is a sought after item. Two recent sales made £102 and £100, although another failed to sell with a reserve of £100. A nice looking copy of *The Bridge* went for £51, whilst a signed edition of *Complicity* made £25.50.

M works continued to attract good prices with an edition of *The Player of Games* making £56.75, and a signed *Use of Weapons* £51. A copy of *The State of the Art* reaching £55.66 on its thirteenth bid, and a signed copy of *Against A Dark Background* made £40.21.

Greenock Morton FC

Iain is, as you all know, a fan of Greenock Morton Football Club. Word reaches **The Banksonian** that he has been interviewed for a feature in a match day programme. We hope to bring you highlights in a future issue after a copy has come our way.

G. Morton got a mention, albeit backwards, in *Look to Windward* where Ilom Dolince is talking about being ready to die and gets reminded: “You also said you wanted to be revived into an especially nubile cheerleader if Notromg Town ever won the Orbital Cup”, the avatar said solemnly.

Mastermind Whisky Answers

Here are the answers to the questions on the back page. Where Iain was wrong his answer is given as well:

- 1) Glenfiddich
Banks's answer: Benriach
- 2) Three years.
- 3) Glenmorangie.
- 4) George Smith.
Banks's answer: William Grant.
- 5) Phenolic compounds.
- 6) Vatted.
- 7) Old Pultney.
- 8) Laphroaig.
Banks's answer: Bunnahabhain.
- 9) Robert Louis Stevenson.
Banks's answer: Robert Burns.
- 10) Dalwhinnie.
- 11) Peter Blake.
Banks's answer: Alasdair Grey.
- 12) Middle Cut.
- 13) Ben Nevis.
- 14) Quercus alba.
- 15) The Angels' Share.
- 16) Tomatin.
- 17) Arran.

Department of Corrections

We had a letter from Mr I. M. Banks of Fife. He pointed out that in last issue's centrespread essay on *Canal Dreams* the description 'Pineapple Face' was applied to President Carter when it was in common usage as a moniker for General Noriega the President of Panama between 1983 and 1989.

He also mentioned that the US edition cover of the book had “the world's only seven string cello”.

Mastermind Whisky Questions

Test your whisky knowledge against the man himself. Here are the questions that Iain was asked on Celebrity Mastermind. The answers are overleaf.

- 1) Which distillery which features a stag's head on its label has a name popularly supposed to derive from the Gaelic for 'Valley Of The Deer'?
- 2) From 1916 the government insisted that Scotch whisky must be aged in casks for at least how many years?
- 3) Which distillery has stills with very long necks with a height of 5.13 meters claim to be the tallest in Scotland?
- 4) Who was the first person to take out a license under the Excise act of 1823 setting up his distillery at his farm in Glenlivet?
- 5) The amount of which aromatic chemical compounds in whisky determines the peatiness of its flavour?
- 6) What is the technical name for malts from more than one distillery that are being blended together?
- 7) Which distillery in Wick is the most northerly in mainland Scotland?
- 8) The name of which Islay whisky is translated from the Gaelic as "the beautiful hollow by the broad bay"?
- 9) Who wrote in his poem "The Scotsman's Return From Abroad" "The king o' drinks as I can see be Talisker, Islay or Glenlivet"?
- 10) Which distillery that at 326m above sea level claims to be the highest and also serves as a weather station?
- 11) Which artist designed the label for the release of 12 bottles of the Macallan 60yo, each bottle containing spirit that was distilled in 1926 and bottled in 1986?
- 12) In the distillation process what name is given to the central part of the spirit run during which spirit is produced and collected?

13) Which distillery did 'Long' John McDonald, a descendant of the chiefs of clan Donald, found in 1825?

14) The wood of which species of oak is first used to store bourbon and then imported to Scotland to be made into Scotch whisky casks?

15) What name is given to the whisky lost in evaporation as it matures in its cask?

16) Which became the first Scottish distillery to be wholly owned by a Japanese company when Takara, Shuzo and Okura, bought it in 1986?

17) On which island did malt whisky production recommence after an interval of some 150 years when a new distillery was opened in 1995?

Life on Mars

The BBC has recently showed, to great acclaim, what has been described as a time-travel cop drama, although this may not be entirely accurate. The cop in question had a car accident in 2006 and has woken up in 1973. Cue the camelhair coated "Guv", his Cortina, and policing methods that do not quite match the standards expected under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

Although what is shown on screen is always 1973, the world of 2006 invades what we are presumably meant to assume is his coma through sounds; mainly voices of his doctors and mother in his head, but sometimes his life support machine, and sometimes via his television. These interludes reminded many online commentators of Banks's novel *The Bridge*, which has its main protagonist in a coma after a car accident, and experiencing an imaginary world with sounds from the real world butting in. Series 2 is on next year.

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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