

# The Banksoniain #14

## An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

February 2009

### Editorial

This issue could easily be described as late, but it is here, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of *The Wasp Factory*. Fourteen issues in five years is not bad going, even if I look back on the original quarterly schedule and wonder how it was achieved.

This issue looks forward to the next Banks's book, the title of which was recently announced on his website, and also to the radio adaptation of *The State of the Art*, which is reviewed. To accompany is an article following Diziet Sma's wander in 1977 Paris.

Looking back there is the usual commentary on the media coverage Banks has received since the last issue, and a report on a number of his public appearances from 2008. A photograph from a reader sends us off to examine the geography of *Complicity*.

The 25th anniversary of the publication of *The Wasp Factory* is also Banks's 55th birthday and the 5th anniversary of **The Banksoniain**. These all occur on 16th February 2009 and are not totally unconnected events, as issue #1 was produced partly in the frustration that nothing seemed to be happening to mark the 20th anniversary of Banks's first published work. This time there is a new edition of the Abacus paperback with a preface by The Man Himself.

With the new book due out in September, the next issue will be scheduled for sometime in August and hopefully there will be details of a forthcoming book tour to report.

Thanks for this issue to the gang at the Iain Banks Forum, especially RedKing, Callum for the photo from Gilmerton, Sonya at the BBC for the CD, Darren at the official Banks website and, of course, Iain M. Banks himself.

### Banks's Next Book

On the Sunday of Newcon 4 Banks said he would be starting to write his next book "a week tomorrow" which would have been October 20, 2008, and near the end of that year, online book retailers started listing a book called, *Untitled Iain Banks 2*, with a publication date of early September 2009. On January 13, 2009 the Iain Banks website announced a name for the book, *Transition*. It is currently undergoing a second draft, and is due back with the publishers by the end of February. Note this is NOT an "M" book.

The UK Hardback (ISBN: 9780316731072) has a scheduled publication date of Thursday, September 3, 2009, with an audiobook (9781405507264), trade paperback (9780316731089) also due out that day, as well as an electronic text edition (9780748112173).

The original single sentence publisher's blurb described the book as: "The stunning new novel from Iain Banks, which echoes his much-loved classic *The Bridge*". During the publicity tour for *Matter*, and other public appearances in 2008 Iain said that he would be taking "a long run up" to the new book and hopefully planned to make it a complicated one - hence the publisher's reference to *The Bridge*.

*Transition* marks the end of Iain's current three-book deal, and the next contract has yet to be negotiated. Banks has provided one pointer to the future. In an interview published in issue #35 of the Australian, *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, he was asked about the long gap between *Look to Windward* and *Matter*, and replied, "I suspect the next SF one will be a Culture novel." This statement was echoed in the Q&A in Norwich during the *Matter* tour.

## Media Scanner

A mention of Iain Banks popped up in **Hansard**, the official record of the British Parliament, back in March 2008. A written question from Stephen O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what edits to Wikipedia had been made by staff in DCMS on its computers. The table that was produced in reply noted that a correction to the Miscellany section in the entry on Iain Banks had been made. Obviously there is an SF fan (or perhaps more than one) in the DCMS, as edits had also been made to the entries for Ken MacLeod, the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the BSFA, along with the small press PS Publishing.

The **Daily Mail** (5/4/2008) reported on the case of Malcolm Webster, a man who was facing extradition to New Zealand on the charge of "forming a fraudulent scheme to obtain life assurance moneys", after his wife was injured in a car accident in 2000 which was reminiscent of a plotline in *The Crow Road*. The newspaper commented on the fact that Webster's first wife died in similar circumstances in Scotland in 1994, two years after the initial publication of the Banks novel, and that the investigation of that incident had been reopened. Webster eventually appeared in court in February 2009, according to the **New Zealand Herald** (3/2/2009) accused of the murder of his first wife and the attempted murder of his second in New Zealand, as Scottish law allows crimes committed outside Scotland to be considered.

Pandora, the gossip column in **The Independent** (18/4/2008) revealed that Cherie Blair had said during her memoir promoting appearance at the London Book Fair, that the last book she read was *Matter*. Both Cherie and Iain are published by Little, Brown.

The **Observer** (25/5/2008) looked back over fifty years of literary debuts and put *The Wasp Factory* into the top ten, the only entrant from the eighties.

George Bush's trip to the UK saw the **Independent** (7/6/2008) cover the call from "leading voices in the worlds of the arts and

politics" for Mr. Bush to face a war crimes trial in the Hague. Iain Banks support was noted.

The **Big Science Read**, which "invites you to explore, re-discover and get excited about science-themed books", was launched at Jodrell Banks's literary weekend in the middle of June 2008. *Matter* was included in the fourteen fiction works that were recommended and also to be voted on in an online poll that lasts for a year. See <http://www.bigscienceread.org/fiction/>

David Quantick's nostalgic look at *The Disappearing Art of the Mix Tape* for **BBC Radio 4** (17/7/2008) had a contribution from Iain discussing his obsession with making his compilation tapes as professional as possible by careful use of particularly short tracks from Ivor Cutler albums to fill in any awkward gaps. He also admitted specifically buying albums to get a single track to put on a mix tape and how home taping was, therefore, not killing music.

Oxfam's special appeal for East Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea and northern Kenya) was launched by Colin Firth, John Hannah and Daniela Nardini, and Iain Banks, according to **The Mirror** (25/7/2008).

In **The Times** (3/8/2008) comedian Russell Kane wrote a short but thoughtful article on *The Wasp Factory* under the headline 'It Moved Me'. He described Frank as "one of the most inhuman children in literary history", but his reaction as a reader was to be "poleaxed by the book's humanity", before concluding that "maybe Banks is such a fine writer that he is able to paint in two colours at once."

Jeff VanderMeer in **The Huffington Post** (14/8/2008) discussing political fiction to read over the summer noted that *Use of Weapons* was back in print (in the US, with the Orbit paperback) and that it was "perhaps the most incisive and shocking commentary on war since Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*".

'Britain's Top 50 Best Loved Authors' (**Express** 19/8/2008) saw Banks in 33rd position in the poll topped by Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl and JK Rowling that was part of

the publicity for the 2008 Costa Book Awards.

The Booker prize always generates press coverage of the books not chosen, and two articles coinciding with the 2008 award, as they were awarding the “Booker of Bookers”, mentioned the fact that *The Wasp Factory* didn't even make the shortlist in 1984. The **Observer** (14/9/2008) described Banks's work as, “Sinisterly powerful, stylish and authoritative.” The **Sunday Telegraph** (12/10/2008) followed a similar vein.

Iain provided an inscribed copy of one of his favourite books, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by Hunter S. Thompson for a BookAid auction on eBay and it sold for £63.

Actor Richard Griffiths writing about his bookshelf in the **New York Times** (26/10/2008) listed *The Algebraist* with the comment, “An extraordinary bit of writing, it tries to convey the idea of surviving on a planet like Jupiter. A fantastic story. Banks is very cruel but entertaining.” He also mentioned *Thirteen* by Richard K. Morgan calling it a “kind of modern take on Philip K. Dick. Clearly a science fiction fan.

Michael Moorcock's obituary of Barrington Bayley in the **Guardian** (13/11/2008) described him as a “writer of metaphysical, absurdist ‘space opera’”, and said he was “was perhaps best known for those he inspired, among them the writers M. John Harrison, Iain M. Banks, William Gibson, Bruce Sterling and the so-called ‘cyberpunks’.”

David Davis MP, former shadow Home Secretary chose the complete works of Iain Banks as he reading when he appeared on Desert Island Discs in November 2008. When Kirsty Young, the programme's presenter, pointed out that the author the right wing politician had chosen was famously left wing the MP chuckled that he thought it would bug Banks.

A letter to the **Times** (9/12/2008) about Climate Change and the world's poorest people was signed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, David Attenborough, Jarvis Cocker, Scarlett Johansson, Bill Nighy and Iain Banks, amongst others.

Banks was also a signatory of the Stop the War Coalition's letter to the **Guardian** (8/1/2009) saying, “We speak out for the people of Gaza. What is happening there is a crime against humanity.”

A profile of Shirley Jackson in the **Independent** (11/1/2009), #19 in a series on Forgotten Authors, commented that her best book was her 1962, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, where, “two sisters and an ancient uncle huddle in psychotic solitude, and the girls create a set of rules for survival that make the hero of Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory* seem entirely normal.” Blimey.

A **Guardian** article (13/1/2009) about wind turbines for houses which was critical about the actual performance that they achieve brought a clarifying letter from Iain three days later as he was named in it as the owner of one. He explained that he had bought one, but had been advised that he would probably not get planning permission as Gordon Brown, who has a house in the same village as Iain, was turned down – although this was before he became Prime Minister when he was just Chancellor. Banks also noted that he had “had a chance to look more closely at the figures and decided, especially given the lack of a feed-in tariff, not to go ahead.”

The **Guardian** had an ambitious project early in 2009 to give readers a list of ‘1000 novels everyone must read’. Three of Iain's works made the list, *The Crow Road* in the ‘Family’ section (20/1/2009) and *The Wasp Factory* and *Consider Phlebas* in the ‘Section Fiction’ section (22/1/2009).

Responding to an article about banker's pay in the **Guardian** (28/1/2009) Banks had a letter published two days later that said, “We let the fat boys take over the tuck shop. We shouldn't be too surprised when we turn up only to discover that the shelves are bare.”

The **BLOODlikeWATER** project for Amnesty that Iain was contributing to, mentioned in issue #13 seems to have died a death, although the official statements from the human rights organisation and the publisher have been that Amnesty wanted to do something more than the publishers envisaged.

# The State Of The Art

## Radio 4 - Afternoon Play

On Thursday, March 5, 2009, an adaptation of the Iain M. Banks novella *The State of the Art* will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4. This is going out in the Afternoon Play slot at 14:15 lasting 45 minutes, and is part of a science fiction radio season on Radios 3, 4 and 7. Yes BBC7 has been brought into the fold.

The announcement of the production came in February 2008 when Paul Cornell revealed on his blog that he could now publically discuss the fact that he had been commissioned by the BBC to adapt the work. He also announced the name of the producer, Nadia Molinari, and stated it would be broadcast later in the year. Cornell was a guest at the one-day Picocon 26 convention a few days later and asked about it during his talk, replied that it was early days yet. As seems to be usual with him, he was very enthusiastic and said he had even made up his own ship name, but did not disclose it.

Cornell is known for his television work on *Doctor Who* (all his episodes have been Hugo nominated), *Robin Hood*, *Primeval* as well as *Coronation Street*, *Holby City* and *Casualty*. He has also written Dr Who novels and audioplays, as well as non-fiction on science fiction subjects. He also writes comics for Marvel, hence the title for his Picocon talk, 'Doing It All', although in his self-deprecating manner he did wonder if the organisers had meant to book Neil Gaiman.

Over the next few months Paul continued to blog about his Banks project, along with his many other undertakings, when it was OK to reveal details. Early in May he said that Iain had seen the recording script and was OK with it - Banks has a policy of just letting those adapting his work get on with it, saying that his skill is that of a novelist and screenplays and the like are different and best left to the experts. Later that month came some casting news, with Sir Anthony Sher playing the *General Contact Unit Arbitrary*, Paterson Joseph as Linter and Nina Sosanya as Sma. Other parts are played by Brigit Forsyth, Graeme Hawley and Conrad Nelson.

Paul attended, and blogged about, the recording sessions in Manchester on Monday

and Tuesday, June 2 and 3, although the news breaking that his *Captain Britain and MI-13* comic had a special appearance by Gordon Brown meant that he had many interview requests to attend to at the same time. This is Paul's first radio adaptation and he was pleasantly surprised when he found that, unlike in television, the writer actually had somewhere to sit, and that the meaning of the text was given great attention. He also got to "appear", laughing and clinking glasses, in the party scene. Around this time it was announced that there would be a BBC Radio Science Fiction Season that *The State of the Art* would be part of, and so it would not be broadcast until 2009, alongside other science fiction Afternoon Plays, a new ten part serial, *Planet B*, on BBC7, and *Rendezvous with Rama* adapted for the Classic Serial slot.

Both Paul and Iain attended the two-day Newcon 4 convention in Northampton in October, and the organisers took the opportunity to have them both on a panel discussing the project and Paul got permission from the BBC to play some extracts, which in the end amounted to about nine minutes worth. Iain had been sent a CD of the finished production before the convention but said had not got round to listening to it and so his reaction in front of the assembled audience was genuinely his initial one.

The first extract played was the opening few minutes, mostly a monologue from Sma who she describes Earth as a type 3 civilisation, and lists some ship names, one of which, *Innocent Bystanders*, was the one made up by Paul. Paul then introduced Iain and asked him to do some "live reviewing". Banks said that he would add the ship to his list of names and added that he would give Paul a little plaque to mark the fact, who replied saying that was the "best news all day" before they went on to discuss the cast.

Banks thought that getting 'Tony' was a great coup and Paul revealed that the fact all three share a literary agent probably helped, commenting that he believed Sher brought a warmth to the *Arbitrary*, but with a steel core that also gave a sinister edge that allows us to question how much the ship is using Sma. Iain added that as The Culture ships have

god-like powers if they are going to use you, there is no choice as they will always be able to outsmart you, and so you just have to hope that they do so with some decency. A number of people had suggested to Paul that Stephen Fry would be an ideal Culture ship, but the two authors agreed that he probably had a little too much baggage for the role.

Before the second clip they also talked about the fact that an hour's worth of material had been recorded and that Paul had initially tried to keep all the character's speech in the 30,000 odd word novella in the radio adaptation, but had to edit some things down. He did, however, manage to retain the *Arbitrary's* speech on why The Culture is right in its entirety as it was very expositional. Iain approved adding that it "was a bit preachy, but it is The Culture, so what do you expect?"

Sma and Linter's encounter in Paris when she was "just passing" was the second clip, and Iain admitted that he was having trouble remembering what he wrote over twenty years ago and so distinguishing between his own lines and those of Paul. Joking that he was thinking, "That's a good bit, did I write that or did you?"

The final clip was of Li'ndane (played with a Mancunian accent) making the speech during his attempt to be elected Captain. This has been a little condensed but in the radio play gets augmented by the ability to have *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* sound effects which Iain said he greatly enjoyed, along with laughing at his own 20 year old *Star Trek* jokes.

Finally Paul said that he wanted, with Iain's permission, to tackle a whole novel next, and Iain replied, "I like it already". They then curtailed their discussion to take a question from the audience that turned out to be about the music in the radio version of *Espedair Street* before the allotted time for the session was over.

Details and news of the BBC Radio SF Season slowly filtered out with **The Stage** (20/1/2009) noting how actors were now finding SF "sexy" and queuing up to appear in such productions when it listed so me of the big-name actors involved in the season.

## Radio Review

### You'll Believe a Volvo Can Fly!

The BBC kindly sent me a review copy, and my listening was all the more poignant for being in Paris one of the locations in the story. See page #8 for Sma's tour of Paris.

The framing of the story as a letter from Sma to a researcher studying Earth with comments at the end by 'The Drone', *Skaffen-Amtiskaw*, has been removed. The production loses nothing for that. I didn't notice until my second listening when checking the text of the novella with the adaptation. It does, without explanation, sometimes jump to Sma looking back on her time on Earth from the future.

So what is presented is a three-headed production. Anthony Sher as the *Arbitrary*, the powerful Culture Ship, in a role expanded from the original, e.g. directing Sma to the Mémorial de la Déportation, and speaking to her through various proxies, and moving from playful to sinister with ease. Nina Sosanya as Sma, the central Culture character who argues for intervention, works through her concern for Linter and her frustration with the situation on Earth with gusto. Paterson Joseph plays Linter, the rogue Culture agent who goes native, emotionally arguing that Earth is better as it has not lost what The Culture has. Banks sets all his Culture stories on the fringes of the civilization as they provide us with a window onto the advanced Utopia, and *The State of the Art*, and this adaptation, with Earth as a foil shows that very effectively.

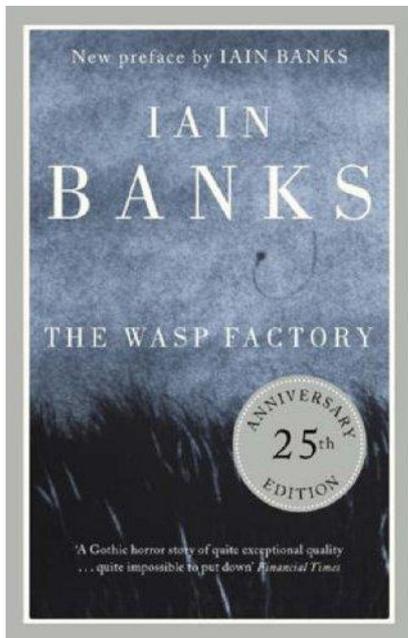
Paul Cornell seems to have very much enjoyed his foray into radio. If you want him to get the chance to adapt a full-length Banks novel then tune in, AND then tell the BBC that you tuned in. The team in Manchester have done a tremendous job realising The Culture into an audio form. The effects are great, as is the Seventies soundtrack, but used sparingly. The supporting cast have fun making up the rest of the *Arbitrary's* crew, getting some of the best lines, as well as playing any of those pesky humans required.

Look for more details around the broadcast date (Thursday, 5 March, 14:15) on the BBC Afternoon Play website at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/afternoonplay>

## The Wasp Factory at 25

Issue #1 of *The Banksonian* hit the Internet 5 years ago, and was, what I believe to be, the only (vaguely) public celebration for the 20th anniversary of Banks's first published novel. In that issue an article looked back at the 20 years of *The Wasp Factory*, its history, reception and status. So has anything changed in the last five years? The book that seemed equally lauded and vilified when first published (and was apparently banned from Harrods<sup>1</sup>) is still being written about, and not just in fanzines, but cited in the press as an exemplar of its times, used for academic study at many levels, and, if anything, it is still enhancing its reputation as a modern classic.



For this anniversary there is at least have an acknowledgement of the fact from Iain's publishers with a new paperback reprint of *The Wasp Factory*, proudly boasting a preface by Iain Banks. Although it is not the "vellum edition bound in goat's skin", that Iain joked about with John Jarrold in Lincoln. His old editor had asked the author how he had

<sup>1</sup> In an email Q&A run via his website, Iain was asked about whether it had been banned anywhere and answered "Apparently it was banned from the Harrods department store book department in London for a while shortly after it was first published. Or maybe it was just sold under the counter; accounts differ." Source: <http://www.iain-banks.net/2008/10/14/iain-banks-email-qa-october-2008/>

changed as a writer over those years and Iain responded by saying that that it had got better mainly through the use of spell checkers. He then added, more seriously, that he was not the best person to judge, that he always left the interpretation of his work to others, and that all he had ever done was to set out to please people with his work.

The celebratory edition has been published under the 1990 Abacus ISBN that is 0349101779. This has unfortunately made it difficult to get hold of. The current Abacus cover art has been used but augmented with, what I understand is, a 'fake' 25th anniversary sticker, i.e. printed directly on the cover, as well as the words "New preface by IAIN BANKS" at the top. It would have been nice to go back to the stark black and white paperback design of the Futura that was employed on the first Abacus editions. Incidentally this Abacus edition has been reprinted every year since it first appeared, sometimes twice. All the shops I physically checked in at the beginning of February still had 2008 reprints on their shelves, and although many Internet retailers have updated the pictures on their websites, it impossible to know whether they are shipping 'new' or 'old' editions. Despite phoning the Little, Brown retail department and specifically requesting the new reprint, thinking they would be more likely to know what they were doing, I was sent a 2008 (un-special) edition. So without getting my hands on a copy to confirm it, I have been told that the preface is the article that Iain wrote for the **Guardian** last year.

The fact that such a newspaper would devote four weeks of its book-club to *The Wasp Factory* speaks of the regard the book is held in. Banks's article was the third of the series and saw him discuss his situation in 1980 when he wrote the book, considering himself a science fiction writer, but not getting any of the three SF novels he wrote in the seventies published. Banks has his first rejection slip, from Jonathon Cape, pinned on the noticeboard in the study where he works at home, and proudly showed it off to the film crew from *The Book Show* that he showed his "Writer's Place" to. The clip is available on YouTube. Still in his twenties Banks decided

to set himself a target of being published by 30, or give up and get a proper job. He therefore decided to try a non SF work and the result was *The Wasp Factory*, which gathered its own collection of rejection slips before being picked up by Macmillan, the sixth or seventh publisher it was sent to, and eventually being on his thirtieth birthday, the rest is history.

UCL Professor John Mullan's contributions were two articles setting out some observations for readers to think about when considering the book, and a final one commenting on the feedback the book-club had generated on the paper's website and at the live event (still available as a podcast from the **Guardian** website). This concentrated on querying how actually shocking the novel is, whether or not it is black comedy whilst noting that some of the attendees were studying it for 'A' Level.

The acceptance of *The Wasp Factory*, Iain Banks into the establishment has continued in the five years the fanzine has been published. The BBC produced an edition of their World Service programme **World Book Club** about the book (see issue #12). Commentators are also citing it as a book that should have won, or at least been in contention for, the Booker prize back in 1984 (see page #2). The Man Himself asked at Newcon 4 whether he was part of the establishment, said that it was not his choice/decision to make or not, and that just by being in the business for 25 years, and with new generations of writers coming along that seemed to automatically elevate him.

A couple of years ago, the **Guardian** (21/4/2007) listed 50 books that defined their eras and included *The Wasp Factory* as representative of the eighties, along with *A Brief History of Time*, *Beloved*, *Midnight's Children*, *Money* and *Bonfire of the Vanities*, and remarked that it contained "one of 20th-century literature's great twists." The **Sunday Times** (5/2/2007) asked writers to recommend books that every child leaving school should have read, and Christopher Brookmyre included the Banks novel in his set of selections. This year it appeared on the reading list at Charterhouse School, and it is

frequently included in academic courses from GCSE upwards.

Last year saw an unabridged talking book finally made available. Reviewed in the **Guardian** (5/4/2008) by Sue Arnold she commented that, "I've finally got hold of a version of Banks's extraordinary first novel with a reader who does it justice ... Peter Kenny is the one reader (I've heard five) who brings out Banks's glorious sardonic wit."

The Chinese translation rights to the book have been sold in both Traditional and Simplified Chinese formats. The former to Yuan-Liou Publishing (who also have the Taiwanese translation rights) and the latter to the Chongqing Publishing Co. This takes to over twenty the different languages the rights have been sold for. The fact that publishers will take the trouble to have a translation made, and then publish what many consider a very Scottish book in a foreign language, including languages of cultures very different to the source material, is another indication of the regard in which *The Wasp Factory* is held around the world.

Unfortunately there is still no film, and probably never will be now, despite the fact that one pair of writers who wrote a screenplay have gone onto great success with their Bond film scripts. For details of the development hell that became of the rights and the actual shooting see issue #1 and #2. At least the author got a car from selling the rights.

So, *The Wasp Factory* is still in print after twenty-five years, a considerable achievement these days. It has seen over twenty translated editions around the world, been adapted for the stage, read on Radio 4, and is the subject of serious academic study. If as Andrew Gimson, the **Times** reviewer back in 1984 concluded, "Perhaps it is all a joke, meant to fool literary London, terrified of seeming prudish, into respect for rubbish." Then is it a joke that is set to run and run. One final note – the book has been chosen by a contributor to the Radio 4 series, *A Good Read*, to be broadcast at 16:30 on Tuesday, 3 March. Respectability? Possibly not, but all this is not the sign of rubbish.

## Diziet Sma's Paris

When the Ship asks Diziet to go to Paris she is sent down in a red Volvo and lands “in the middle of some old coal workings in the unlovely north of France, near Bethune.” She then drives to Paris where “the whole city seemed snarled up with some cycle race”. Presumably this is the Tour de France, the most famous cycle race in the world. This allows us to date the visit. In 1977 the final two stages of the race took place in Paris, and last day of that Tour was Sunday, July 24.

Linter was living in a “courtyard just off the Boulevard St Germain”. This is a long road that runs roughly parallel to the Seine from the Place du Palais Bourbon where there is the National Assembly to the Pont de Sully. This end of the road is now dominated by the Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute) but that was constructed in the eighties after Sma's visit.

The exact location of Linter's place is not revealed and is difficult to determine. When she does not find him at home she wanders the streets of Paris soon coming to the junction with the Boulevard St Michel so presumably it is in that area.

Sma then heads towards the Seine, finding herself in the shadow of Notre Dame on the Île de la Cité, and then wandering along the banks of the Seine enjoying the cluttered buildings and the smell of roasting coffee so much that she does not find the Pompidou Centre but ends up at the triangular park at the extreme upstream (i.e. east) end of the island. Here she finds the Mémorial de la Déportation.

The memorial was designed by Georges-Henri Pingusson, and although the whole project had started in 1953 by the Réseau du souvenir (Network of Remembrance) finding a site, raising the money, selecting an architect, and getting it built meant that it only opened in 1962 on what was previously the site of a morgue. The monument is sunk into the ground in rough white concrete, and uses black metal fittings with narrow claustrophobic corridors emphasising the starkness of the concentration camps the deportees were sent to.



In the background above is the back of Notre Dame, whilst in the centre can be seen the memorial and just above the river level the floor level windows “barred by a jagged construction of black steel” which are shown below from the inside.



Sma also remembers, “a thousand tiny lights, in rows, down a grilled-off tunnel.” Each light, in fact there are many thousands, represents a deportee who died.



Leaving the memorial Sma is in a bit of a daze. She heads to the Louvre (to see the Mona Lisa) and then Tuileries and Les Invalides before lunching near St Sulpice Metro, which is just to the south of the Boulevard St Germain. After this she heads to and this time finds him at home. Her lunch location may be a pointer to where Linter's flat is, but I did not find an obvious candidate for the courtyard in the brief search I did.

## Banks on Tour 2008

The short promotion tour for *Matter* reached the branch of Waterstone's in **Norwich** on 27 February. Banks read the prologue admitting that this was a bit of a cheat as there was therefore no need to introduce anything. The city has an active science fiction society (that were distributing flyers) and the event had sold out with getting on for 150 people there by my reckoning. It was also interesting to note that the copies of *Matter* that were on display were already reprints just a couple of weeks after the official publication date.

The questions that Iain was asked were heavily slanted towards his SF work. Was he was more positive than Ken MacLeod about the Singularity? "Yes, basically", he said after briefly explaining for his non-SF fans what the concept was. Next up was a query on whether a post scarcity society was really possibly without infinite energy, "probably not for us", said Banks, "the Golden Age between the fall of the wall and the fall of the towers (1989 - 2001) we didn't do a good job of".

The anti-American rants in *Raw Spirit* were commented on by a questioner who then asked about The Culture being a Superpower like the US is. Banks said he only had an issue with the ¼ of Americans that voted for Bush, before admitting that he could see the similarities, but The Culture was not capitalistic or Imperialistic and they can statistically prove that they are doing you good. His influence on other authors was asked about, but Iain said that you would have to ask those authors themselves, and he knew of no great debt that he was owed by anyone. This led to a query on his inspirations and he mentioned Asimov, Heinlein and "the very thoughtful" Aldiss, as well as Mike Harrison, Dan Simmons and John Sladek, before broadening the list out from "Austen to Zelazny, and thirty points in between."

The author then got onto the subject of actually writing. There is a document about The Culture that he occasionally refers to just to make sure he doesn't contradict himself, and if he did find an issue he would happily fix it in a reprint. Asked about what he was

working on for the Amnesty project (see **Banksoniain** #13, and the previous page) he said he had a story about torture in mind.

Iain appeared at **Lincoln Book Festival** on 12 May, interviewed by his old editor and friend John Jarrold. John explained how he had first met Iain at a Science Fiction convention. This was *Mexicon 2*, and it took place in Birmingham in February 1986. Iain had been invited, and, as one of his favourite authors, Alasdair Gray, had been a guest at the first *Mexicon*, he thought, "if it was good enough for him, it is good enough for me." A bonus being that William Gibson was there too. It is because of Iain's attendance at the second *Mexicon* that the first appearance of the epilogue for *Against a Dark Background* is in the souvenir book for *Mexicon 6*.

The interview followed the usual pattern at these events, a roughly chronological career discussion with some interesting diversions. Iain commented that he is on good terms with the Special Branch officers that are found in his village now that it has the constituency home of the Prime Minister in it, and also that bringing in more super civilizations into *Matter* was a way of making The Culture more interesting to him as the writer.

Amongst the questions from the audience was one about the possibility of a civil war between Culture Minds, which Banks thought was a bizarre concept, as he believes the smarter the intelligence the more likely it will be nicer. In Norwich Banks had expressed a similar sentiment, if you are that powerful, "why waste time being nasty". He went on to discuss how SF allows authors to do whatever they like, including destroying the universe, which he thinks is done too often. Later, responding to a question about sequels – he doesn't do them because of pride in creating new characters, Banks also likened The Culture as having a psychedelic palette of colours to use as an artist.

Iain made an appearance at **Gateshead Central Library** on 12 September, as part of the series of events for National Year of Reading. Our North of England correspondent reported a cross section of fans ranging from Culture Geeks to a WI reading club. Banks mentioned a title for an early work that none

of us had heard before, *The Top Of Poseidon*, as well as talking about known but unpublished works, *The Hungarian Lift-Jet* and *The Tashkent Rambler*. It fits in with the thriller / adventure themed books he says he was writing in his teens, with the name coming from the Poseidon missile system that replaced Polaris. Checking with Iain he confirmed that *The Top of Poseidon* was the 30,000 word first attempt at what later became *The Hungarian Lift-Jet*, and added that there was a big shoot-out in a building yard in Brussels as far as he could recall. In Gateshead he also mentioned that his diesel Yaris that had replaced his car collection has apparently been 'souped-up' a bit.

Banks shared Guest of Honour status at **Newcon 4**, held in the Old Fishmarket in Northampton over the second weekend of October, with his old school-friend Ken MacLeod and Storm Constantine, with Paul Cornell billed as a Special Guest.

On the Saturday evening Paul Cornell played extracts from his forthcoming BBC Radio 4 adaptation of *The State of the Art*, with Banks providing live reaction. See pages #4 and #5.

On the Sunday morning, Iain hosted a Kaffeeklatsche, which is a limited attendance session, giving convention attendees the chance to chat with a guest in an informal manner.

It kicked off with more of the author's reaction to the forthcoming radio adaptation, saying that he was impressed and particularly liked the ship name. He explained that he has a list of over 2000 ship names ready and waiting as it can interrupt the flow of his writing if he has to stop and think of one on the spot. He also has two lists of character names, at least one for every letter of the alphabet, with one list for science fiction and another for mainstream. He also usually has an idea of the sound of the name that would be right for a character, and picks one accordingly. As an aside on the subject of names Banks commented that checked the Oban phone book to make sure there were not any McHoans – the main family name from *The Crow Road* – in it, but he was not expecting any as he made the name up from the same source as the band the Pogues. There

is an Irish Gaelic phrase, *póg mo thóin*, which apparently means kiss my arse.

Asked about what he listened to when he writes Iain said mainly BBC Radio 1 or 3, although he tries to avoid opera and spoken word programmes. He then admitted that he is not really listening, he just wants to hear a good melody, nothing different to what he chooses to listen to normally. Occasionally he will write to something like the Glenn Gould 10 CD Bach collection which he did with one of The Culture books.

When asked about avoiding plagiarism Banks said to just call it homage, but revealed that he tends not to read novels whilst writing his own books as he tends to write like whoever he is reading but badly. He went on to say that Iain Banks was a less tricky writer than Iain M. Banks, as that with SF being about ideas there was enough strangeness in that work before getting into any literary trickery. *The Bridge* was his favourite book, the one his was most pleased with, but he admitted that intelligent friends of his had given up on it, although he had not meant to bamboozle people at all.

Later that afternoon, John Clute interviewed both Ken MacLeod and Iain in a session was introduced by Alan Moore, a Northampton resident who proclaimed himself amazed that such an event could happen in his home town.

Clute first asked the pair about appearing at events such as this and projecting themselves. Banks said that he first did it for the paperback of *The Wasp Factory* on a Futura publicity roadshow in 1983 before it was even published and that he had been very nervous. Adding that the arrival of Waterstone's had re-generated the experience of writer's actually speaking to the public, as they are an extension of the camp fire storyteller who wouldn't eat unless he told a good story, and that the novel is a "modern" falsity to this heritage. The writer's text can stand on its own without any author comment, but a premium has been placed on authors that can and do perform well in front of an audience.

Responding to a query about whether his public persona was problematic, Banks said that although regarded as an *enfant terrible* by

some reviewers (and therefore some of the public) it wore off after a while especially as he wants to be liked and is a naturally frivolous person who says something serious and then immediately undercuts it. He has fallen into a persona unconsciously by being himself. When queried on making a mark and getting heard, Banks said that he blamed Gerry Anderson and the credits of *Thunderbirds*, which inspired him to write kinetic fiction with a serious point, which is what he loves to do. Each new generation of writers need to be noisy and go against the established hierarchy in order to replace it.

Whilst discussing Newcon 4 it is worth noting that Gary Lloyd, the musician and composer that Iain is working on the *Espedair Street* tribute album with was also attended the convention, and the pair were going to be working on finalizing the lyric sheets for this long running project.

## Matter Paperback

The UK paperback of *Matter* was published on Thursday, 5 February, coming in at a whopping 593 pages for the novel, but even more in total as this edition has 'extras'. There is a composite interview with Iain made up of questions and answers about The Culture from a variety of previously published interviews, and the book also contains the first two chapters of *Consider Phlebas*, the first published Culture book.

## State of the Art Film?

The US film newspaper **Variety** (5/12/2008) reported about a deal struck between producers Film & Music Entertainment, and director Dominic Murphy. One of the film titles listed as for development as part of the joint venture was "an adaptation of Iain M. Banks' novel *The State of the Art*".

Unfortunately checking with Iain's agent there seems to be no basis in fact for the Banks novella to be included in a list of films under development. Despite being mentioned again, this time as, "story from his [Banks's] Culture cycle", in the UK based **ScreenDaily** (8/2/2009) it is still not true. It leaves the door open for a Paul Cornell screenplay!

## Three Fiat 126s

### Geography and Reality in *Complicity*

In the second chapter of *Complicity* there is a reference to Cameron Colley driving through the village of Gilmerton. This is a real place where the A85, which cuts across Scotland from Perth to Oban, both locations used by Banks in other books, has its junction with the A822. In the book Colley says, "I pass through Gilmerton, a wee village just outside Crieff, where I'd turn off for Strathspeld if I was heading that way." Strathspeld being the fictional location where Cameron and Andy grew up. In reality the A822 takes you into the Sma' Glen, presumably the source for Diziet's name in *State of the Art* and *Use of Weapons*, and up towards Aberfeldy (near where JK Rowling has her estate).

Colley continues, "Used to be there was a collection of three identical little blue Fiat 126s sitting facing the road here outside one of the houses", and goes on to say they recently disappeared. A **Banksoniain** reader was recently clearing out some of his childhood belongings from his parents' house in the village and came across a photo of the cars taken in around 1989.



Fiat 126s at Gilmerton, by Callum

A higher quality version of the image has been attached to the Wikipedia entry for *Complicity*.

Colley's journey continues through the real Lix Toll, where there is, and again this is true, "a bright yellow Land Rover about ten foot tall facing the road, not on wheels but on four black triangular tracks", to the fictional Dorluinan, where the whisky distillery Cameron is visiting is meant to be located.

## Banksoniain Calendar

### 2009

Sunday, 22 February, 16:00

**Open Book** on BBC Radio 4, Interviewed about SF. Repeated Thursday 26, 16:00.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/arts/openbook/openbook.shtml>

Tuesday, 3 March, 16:30

**A Good Read** on BBC Radio 4 will feature *The Wasp Factory*. Repeated Friday 6, 23:00.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/arts/agoodread.shtml>

Thursday, 5 March, 14:15

*The State of the Art*, adapted by Paul Cornell is the **Afternoon Play** on BBC Radio 4.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/afternoonplay/>

Wednesday, 1 April, 16:15 - 18:15

**Middlesex University Literary Festival**, where Iain is speaking on the second day of the student-organised two-day event. FREE.

<http://www.freewebs.com/mdxlitfest/>

Friday 15 May, TBC

**Trinity College Literary Society**, Dublin

<http://sites.google.com/site/trinityliterarysociety/events-1>

Friday, 22 May, 19:30

**West Dunbartonshire Literature Festival**, Balloch Library. With Ken MacLeod.

Sunday-Wednesday, 7-10 June

**Prague Writer's Festival**, one of a number of guest authors.

<http://www.pwf.cz>

Saturday/Sunday, 25/26 July

**Satellite 2**, Iain is the only Guest of Honour at this Glasgow convention.

<http://www.satellite2.org.uk/>

August, TBC

**Edinburgh International Book Festival**,

Banks's annual appearance.

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

Thursday, 3 September, TBC

UK publication date for *Transition*.

### 2010

Friday - Monday, 2-5 April

**Odyssey 2010** – Eastercon, the 61st British National Science Fiction Convention, where Iain is one of the Guests of Honour. Join now.

<http://www.odyssey2010.org/>

## Banks's Backlist

Clipper Audio has announced releases of the Toby Longworth unabridged (18 hour) reading of *Matter* on both 16 CDs (ISBN: 9781407426853) and 13 cassettes (9781407431215). This full version had previously only been available as a download, with a 5½ hour abridgement available on CD from Hachette Audio. Clipper have also issued the Peter Kenny narrated unabridged edition of *The Wasp Factory* in the Playaway format (9781407418308), which is a pre-loaded electronic audiobook.

MacAdam Cage published hardback and paperback editions of *The Crow Road* in the US in 2008, with a Dorothy Smith cover like their edition of *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*. A special slip-cased edition, with a signed bookplate, was produced exclusively for members of Powell's Books subscription club, that was accompanied by a "CD of original music by Portland artists and a limited printing of Graeme Thomson's 40 greatest death songs of all time" was volume 6 of their Indiespensable series.

Orbit US continue their trade paperback series with *Against a Dark Background* to be published in July 2009. ISBN: 9780316036375.

A French edition of *Matter* has been published by Robert Laffont. Called *Trames*, it has been translated by Patrick Dusoulier. ISBN: 9782221111338. The book includes a French bibliography by Alain Sprauel and a translation of *A Few Notes On The Culture*.

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

If you have any corrections, comments, contributions, or want a paper copy then email: [banksoniain@gmail.com](mailto:banksoniain@gmail.com)

**N.B.** Other Iain M Banks events are available. Any calendar updates will appear in our publically available Google Calendar. See:

<http://www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=banksoniain%40gmail.com>

Do confirm event details and Iain's attendance with organisers before travelling.

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