

The Banksoniain #6

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

May 2005

Editorial

Issue #6, and we deviate from the UK publication history to write a book biography of *The State of the Art* and the rest of Banks short fiction. Editorial justification for this, if you need one, is based on those immortal words sung by new Dr Who assistant Billie Piper, "Because I Want To".

The only bit of *The State of the Art* turned into something else is *Piece* which has been covered in previous **Banksoniains**. So **The Unwritten Banks** returns, with newly researched information, to *The Bridge*.

We also have a couple of special features: **Investment Banks**, uses articles from *Book and Magazine Collector* to see whether those first editions gathering dust are also appreciating in value, and **Trick of the Mind**, which examines, with pictures, Iain's recent mind-boggling appearance on TV.

Banks in Translation examines how the Finns have taken to his work. **Banks Obscura** is taken over by a more detailed look at the race for this year's Hugos and brief history of other awards Iain has picked up over the years.

Not "THE" Iain Banks fails to appear. I seem to have run out of Internet savvy Iain Bankses to email questions to about their namesake, but have no fear this column will return.

Scary stuff happens. Searching for Banks related references on the University of Liverpool library system, which includes the impressive Science Fiction Foundation collection, I discovered that they now have a listing for **The Banksoniain** with the paper edition of issue #3 residing in their archives.

Anyway, thanks this issue to, Gary Lloyd, and, of course, Iain M. Banks.

Award News

The big news for this issue is that *The Algebraist* has been nominated for the Best Novel Hugo award. That is the informal name for the World Science Fiction Society awards that are given out at each year's Worldcon. The nominations are voted for by members of that year's and the previous year's Worldcons. This year the convention is in Glasgow and all the Best Novel nominees are British which pleased the crowd when the announcement was made at Eastercon. The other nominees are, alphabetically: *Iron Council* by China Miéville; *Iron Sunrise* by Charles Stross; *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* by Susanna Clarke and *River of Gods* by Ian McDonald. See also page # 11.

Banks Live

10:45am 20th July 2005 at Buxton Festival. Iain Banks will talk, read and answer questions in the Opera House. Tickets are £9. See <http://www.buxtonfestival.co.uk/literary.htm>

Publication News

The UK paperback of *The Algebraist* is due for publication in July, as is the first French edition of the title from Bragelonne. The Russian, Finnish, Italian and Germany rights have also been sold.

The US publication, from Night Shade Books, is due in September. No news on the cover or artist yet, but there are plans for a limited edition as well.

Banks's Next Book

Time Warner have included an "Untitled Iain Banks" in their latest rights list as planned for publication by Little Brown in September 2006.

Media Scanner

The **Birmingham Post** (16/02/05) as noted in their birthday listing for that day still believe that Iain won the Booker Prize in 1998 (see **Banksoniain #2**).

Ansible #212 reported that Iain was mentioned in the Round Britain Quiz on BBC Radio 4 (28/02/05).

The sale of the rights to *The Algebraist* to a US publisher (see page #1) saw an interesting and lengthy interview in the online magazine **The Salon**. See: www.salon.com/books/int/2005/02/17/banks

The publisher had primed the interviewer with some information which included the fact that Iain would not be doing a signing tour owing to his lack of passport. This was picked back up by some UK newspapers, and in **The Scotsman** (18/02/05) Simon Pia headed his column as 'Have book, will not travel' and recycled some Banks quotes about the passport destruction. Mike Mceachran, however, in the **Daily Record** (19/02/05) didn't bother to check dates or do anything more than the minimum of research for his article, and claimed that "Scots author Iain Banks has been forced to cancel an overseas book tour - after he cut up his passport". As the rights were not sold until after the passport had been destroyed no tour could possibly have been arranged or therefore cancelled. Mr Mceachran also alleged that "fans of the author in the United States have slammed Banks for being anti-American" but did not supply any evidence of such attitudes. With Bush's re-election last year and Blair's re-election recently it looks like Banks fans abroad will have to wait for the author's near neighbour Gordon Brown to take over before they can expect any overseas personal appearances.

It was announced by the University of Glasgow (23/02/05) that Iain Banks was among fifteen "distinguished figures from the worlds of literature, art, business, science, and sports are to be honoured" with degrees in July. This DLitt, the abbreviation of the Latin Doctor Litterarum, will be Banks's fourth doctorate, and in the citation he was described as "acclaimed author and ambassador for

Scotland's literary culture". Ambassador-staying-at-home, that would be.

I don't know what Iain Banks has ever done to upset Allan Brown, but the newspaper hack likes to make disparaging remarks about the successful and internationally famous novelist every once in a while. In his 'Restless native' column in the **Sunday Times** (06/02/05) after relating a story of how Jim Kerr threatened to defenestrate him from the sixth floor of a London hotel, he revealed that the Saltire Society had asked him to submit nominations for its 2005 literary awards. He used this as an opportunity to attack AL Kennedy, Morna Sutherland, Christopher Brookmyre and Iain Banks in the form of some fake mini reviews. One of which read: "*My Fortnight in Hell*, by Iain Banks: A deeply disturbing meditation on urban alienation and paranoia by the master of technologically inspired nightmares. When Garth Metaphor is told that his malfunctioning Apple Mac will take two weeks to repair, his world falls apart. The novel follows Garth's faltering attempts to leave the house occasionally, speak to other people, read newspapers and go without looking up nude photographs of minor television celebrities on the internet. The scene where the hero must purchase a book of stamps is brutal and unflinching." This is very similar to his 2002 fake review of *The Beekeeper*, some originality in his drivel would be appreciated.

Susan Mansfield in **The Scotsman** (26/02/05) reviewed the Banks/MacLeod joint appearance at the Glasgow Writer's Festival. She commented that the pair "functioned as a double act, Banks the comic to MacLeod's straight man". MacLeod, she said, argued that Sci-fi "is a literature of change. It is a literature which examines and analyses future possibilities, not only in technology but in economics, politics and the structures of society", whilst Iain had proclaimed that: "It has the capability to be the most important literature on the planet."

The List published a guide to *The 100 Best Scottish Books of All Time* written by Professor Willy Maley, of Glasgow University, in conjunction with the Scottish Book Trust, and sponsored by Orange. This

aroused some controversy with the definition of Scottish, which according to **The Scotsman** (04/03/05) included books like Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, because she was living in Scotland at the time she wrote it. They should have no complaint about the Scottish credentials of Iain Banks and his debut novel *The Wasp Factory* which also made the list, note that a limit of one book per author was imposed by the compiler in order to "to show as many sides to Scotland as possible, and to showcase the forms and genres in which Scotland excels". Doug Johnstone wrote the three hundred word entry about *The Wasp Factory* and competently describes the novel.

In conjunction with the booklet's publication, a vote is being conducted to find the Best Scottish Book of All Time with the winner being announced at the Edinburgh Book Festival on August 27th. The **Daily Mail** (04/03/05) commented that the fact that this was being done by text message and Internet (see <http://www.thelist.co.uk>) would mean that "contemporary novels are likely to figure disproportionately" as the voter profile would be biased towards the younger age groups and so, Steven Henry lamented, *Trainspotting* was "being tipped as an early frontrunner".

Iain was quoted in a local paper, the **Greenock Telegraph** (08/03/05), as saying that the town planners in his former home town of Gourock had done worse damage to it than the Luftwaffe. This was picked up by in the national press (**Sun** 10/03/05) and tackled in more detail by the quality Scottish press. The **Herald** (10/03/05) rolled out an SNP member of the Scottish Parliament to comment and also included some words from the original article by a local councillor to defend the town. The original article also mentioned the fact that Iain still visits to play cards with old friends, but would not move back permanently because of the weather, "I remember too much rain," he said. "It makes Fife seem like southern California"

The **Guardian** (23/04/05) quiz asked, amongst other things, "What links: Aristophanes; Iain Banks; deadly jellyfish and privileged Americans?" Answer on the back page, tucked away in the colophon.

In an interview in **The Scotsman** (25/04/05) Iain Rankin postulated "there's me and Iain Banks and Val McDermid all coming from central Fife at the one time. We think we may possibly be the result of some cruel medical experiment, like the X-Files." Hmmmm.

A book review by Michael Dibdin in the **Guardian** (14/05/05) made reference to *Snow is Silent* by Benjamin Prado being "not nearly as wacky as Iain Banks' *Walking on Glass*" but sharing with that and Martin Amis's *London Fields* "the core conceit of an average bloke who is first set up and then coldcocked by a tantalising tease for reasons that he could not possibly hope to understand".

Not sure if Iain will like this, but the **Sunday Telegraph's** Melissa Kite reported (15/05/05) in her profile of David Davis "bookies' favourite to be the next Tory leader" that the bookshelves in the study of his Yorkshire farmhouse "are heaving with books on technology. Beneath them there are texts on mythology, anthropology and psychology. There are three shelves of military history. Novels are predominantly thrillers, Patricia Cornwell and Iain Banks".

Danuta Kean in the **Independent on Sunday** (15/05/05) also seems to think that Iain Banks writes thrillers. In an article about book jackets men it seems "read hard-edged thrillers in no-nonsense brown or black, real books for real men from Iain Banks to Ian Rankin, Dan Brown to Andy McNab".

The Mirror (16/05/05) reported in an article about Christopher Brookmyre achieving his boyhood dream, of playing football with St Mirren that "fellow Scot Iain Banks, for instance, decided he wanted to buy an aeroplane after crashing a Porsche". Whilst this is, I believe, chronologically correct, I am not entirely sure that any causal link should be inferred. St Mirren is, of course, the local rival of Iain's team, Greenock Morton. For many years they have been the only two senior football teams in Renfrewshire, and so regularly meet in the final of the Renfrewshire Cup, and have won it 47 times each in its 125 year history, with Morton the current holders.

Media Scanner continues on page #12

Trick of the Mind

In mid May Iain was on *Derren Brown: Trick of the Mind*. This show, as Derren says in his introduction “fuses magic, suggestion, psychology, misdirection and showmanship.”

For the trick with Banks, Derren explained that “the challenge of influencing the choice of a single word from a pile of books is an idea that has been occupying me for some time. I came up with something I thought might work and invited one of the country’s most prolific authors to try it out on.”

Iain was presented with a glass of whisky and all his books. Derren asked him to pick a set “classic fiction or science fiction?” and then wrote down a word on a pad, showed the people at home, got Iain to sign the back of it and put the bottle of whisky on it. The SF was then arranged in two rows of five books and Iain picked a row to eliminate.



This, after Derren had quickly inspected the books and rearranged them slightly, left a row of *Consider Phlebas*, *Inversions*, *Feersum Endjinn*, *The Player of Games* and *Look to Windward*. Iain picked the middle of these and when asked if he was happy with the choice said that he was and that “it is written in a very strange vernacular in places, so if you are after a particular word that might make it slightly more difficult.”

Derren flicked through the brand new looking copy of the paperback of *Feersum Endjinn* and commented that it had about 280 pages and, whilst asking Iain when he wrote it, seemed to break the spine at a particular point. He handed the book back to Iain and

asked him to riffle through the pages and choose one saying “where ever the book seems to suggest stop point for you” and leaving his hand on the author’s right arm. It did not appear to stop where Derren had pressed it.

Derren then asked Iain to pick a page from the two then move his eyes up and down the page to pick out a section. When this was done Iain was to read out a sentence or two from there, and then choose a word from that section. He explained that it would be fine to choose ‘and’ or ‘the’ but that these were, of course, in all his books and so “you might want to go for a word that jumps out at you a little bit more” and then Iain chose he word.

Derren asked what it was and he said “pop” (from page 110). Iain was given a chance to change his mind but did not, and Derren then recapped that that one word was chosen from the two million of Banks’s published works and asked Iain if he was happy that he had had a free choice, and whilst Iain answered “Certainly” handed the pad to him, who turned it over to see what the audience had seen Derren write five minutes before, the word pop on the pad which induced much laughter and amazement.



Iain said that he wished he knew how it was done, to which was shot back, “so do I”, from Derren. There was then a short piece with Iain talking about the trick and how the book chose itself by having “the largest number of bizarrely spelt words” but how he didn’t pick one of those in the end. He also commented that it was frustrating seeing it happen right in front of him and having no idea how it was done.

Investment Banks

The Wasp Factory – Safe as Houses

Bibliographies with prices of Banks's have now appeared in two separate editions of **Book and Magazine Collector**. The first in issue #148 was back in July 1996 and the second in January 2005's issue, #251. This gives us an opportunity to look at the appreciation in value that his works are achieving and assess their worth as investments.

The original article had an accompanying profile by David Howard and covered Banks work up to the then in print *Whit*, and is a very good introduction to and discussion of Bank's early work. The update has a decently long interview by Paul Willets that was done during *The Algebraist* publicity round. Unfortunately the bibliography has only been updated with his major works. It would have been nice to have a complete list of new secondary works like his introduction to Ken MacLeod's *The Human Front* (PS Publishing edition).

The top three Banks works by their percentage increase in value are:

Title	Increase	1996	2005
<i>The Wasp Factory</i>	213%	£35/45	£100/150
<i>Cleaning Up</i>	167%	£12/18	£30/50
<i>Consider Phlebas</i>	150%	£15/25	£40/60

The methodology used to calculate the percentages was to compare the average of the low and high ends of the band given for prices of fine grade books with dust wrappers (if applicable) and unsigned.

Two of these are the first appearance by each of the names used by Banks, which had small print runs. The other is a limited edition chapbook from Novacon 17, and other ephemera from the convention contains articles about Banks from his then hardback and paperback publishers.

Other early works by either name have also appreciated well: *Walking on Glass*, *The Bridge*, *Espedair Street*, *The Player of Games* and *Use of Weapons* all show increases of

100% or more. The more recent works which were produced and sold in large numbers with extensive UK signing tours are much more widely available and subsequently command lower prices.

This compares favourably with the stock market, which saw the FTSE-100 achieve a 30% rise in the period July 1996 to January 2005, although I haven't allowed for any dividend yield. It is on a par with the UK House Price Index produced by the Halifax which went from 209.8 in Q3-1996 to 520.2 in Q1-2005, a 148% increase. The Retail Price Index moved from 152.4 to 188.9 during this time, a 24% increase, whilst new hardback Banks book have only increased from *Whit's* £15.99 RRP to *The Algebraist's* £17.99 (13%), and with the development of online discount retailers the price the average Banks buyer is paying has probably fallen.

I would have to say that based on observation from prices that items have sold for on eBay or at auction, these estimates could be considered to be a little on the low side, and so may have been back in 1996. There are, of course, other considerations to be taking into account when valuing a book.

Condition is everything to a serious collector, and the prices discussed here are for fine books with fine dust wrappers. Anything that detracts from a book's condition should seriously affect the price. A large proportion of the early Banks first editions offered for sale are ex-library editions which should not reach anywhere near the prices quoted here.

Signatures are interesting in collection terms. Personally I try to avoid buying items that have already been signed, but many collectors seem to value the associational status that a signature gives, especially if the signature is dated on the official publication date.

Banks himself proclaims to have no sentimental attachment to books, and thinks that the laws of supply and demand should mean that the second printing of *The Wasp Factory* should therefore command a higher price. The reprints were in blocks of just 1,500 against the first's run of 5,000 or 10,000 depending on which figures you believe.

The State of the Art

The State of the Art is both a novella and a collection that includes that work. The majority of Banks's short work was published in the period 1987-1989, and so it fits in about here in our book biography series, and it also makes sense to examine it all in one go.

The novella was published in the US by Mark V. Ziesing in 1989 with a cover illustrated by Arnie Fenner. A limited (400) slipcased edition signed by the author and artist was also produced. *Locus* magazine's review of the year listed it at #16 in the novella list published in 1990.

Originally written in 1979 the novella is set on Earth in 1977 when the Culture ship General Contact Unit Arbitrary visits and the story focuses on how the crew members have different ideas as to what should be done with the planet. Asked, in 1989, about how much was rewritten Iain commented that "I tightened it up a little bit. The grammar's a little better and the spelling's a lot better"¹. It was initially intended as a short story but grew longer than Iain expected the author admitted in his 1995 interview with Andrew Wilson².

The setup for the story is that Dizet Sma, a character who also appears in the novel *Use of Weapons* (originally written before this work but published afterwards), has been asked to recount the story of the visit to Earth by a scholar, Petrain, one of apparently many in The Culture studying the planet. The hundred days that Sma refers to at the start is, as Banks noted in the interview with David Howe³, the time in which the events described in *Use of Weapons* occur, and in that book she comments, "send a stalling letter to that Petrain guy", who turns up again as the author of the essays at the end of *Consider Phlebas*. Iain goes on to describe the character as "a sort of scholarly link between the books but he doesn't appear in any of them".

Recalling data and conversations we find that Sma suggested that contact should be made in

¹ Journal Wired #1, Winter 1989.

² Scottish Book Collector #4/9.

³ Starburst #151.

order to fix the problems, although another crew member, Li, comments that the most elegant solution would be to use a micro black hole, whilst another, Linter, 'goes native'. Linter eventually persuades the ship to downgrade his physiology to Earth human levels. Asked in an interview about that character's 'affliction' with Roman Catholicism⁴, Iain explain that "he falls in love with the irrationality of Christianity, with the ideas of pain and death, but he feels it's about having fun, and sex, and more fun, and more sex". Going onto say, "He dies, because that's me playing God. If you're stupid, you die." Another interview, in *SFX*, saw Banks comment on the story: "I thought it would be interesting to see what would happen if the Culture found us. Basically it's a joke, Earth ends up getting used as a controlled experiment."

The review in *Foundation #49* by Mike Christie highlighted the contrast that the story offers between Banks's utopia, The Culture, and Earth. He comments that Banks does pull off the "high-tech sf" with "good political utopia". The Sma-Linter interaction is described as "the central debate of all utopias", that is "Even if it were possible to live like that, would we really want to?", with Christie seeming to delight in Banks's switching round of the usual argument.

Bruce Morton in his review of the collection in *The Times* (05/05/91) described the novella as a "morality play" with the main characters and the Ship "gods, or Fates in debate" over what to do with Earth. His view on the whole book was that it was "shot through with a dark sense of humour which makes it all the more appealing for non-SF readers". A similar view was expressed thirteen years later in *Publishers Weekly* (01/11/04) which commented "Banks's unsettling tales bestow a grim gift, the ability to see ourselves as others might see us".

The collection was first published by Orbit in the UK in 1991 with a cover by Mark Salwowski. It included the novella and seven other stories that had previously seen the light of day in various publications. The individual

⁴ Trinity's Alternate Magazine, Feb 1997.

stories were each illustrated in a woodcut style by Nick Day.

A Gift from the Culture, was originally published in **Interzone** #20 (Summer 1987) with three illustrations by SMS. It has been described as “a character-study of a moral jellyfish” by Chris Gilmore⁵.

The Roz Kaveney edited anthology, *Tales from the Forbidden Planet*, saw the initial publication of the other Culture short story, *Descendent*, in 1987. The Titan produced book had stories from authors that had all done signings at the Forbidden Planet store in London. Each of the fourteen ‘Tales of Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy’ had an accompanying illustration, with the one for Iain’s work done by Dave Gibbons. There was also a slipcased limited edition signed by all the authors and artists.

Scratch was originally in published in **The Fiction Magazine** (July-August 1987) an edition which seems to have been a Sci-Fi special; including Gary Kilworth’s story, *Feral Moon*, Colin Greenland’s, *The Living End*, and a review of Keith Roberts’s *Grainne* by the Paul Kincaid. David Howe³, asked about the genesis of this story, which he described as telling the story of the end of the world, “through the use of words, disconnected thoughts, punctuation and abbreviation”. Banks’s reply was that it “was the culmination of my reading a lot of stuff that didn’t seem connected but was”. These articles, Iain mentioned the **Guardian** and (his girlfriend’s) **Cosmopolitan**, were about the Thatcher government’s dismantling of the NHS and the prospect of nuclear war. “All this just sort of flooded out and became *Scratch*”, he said.

David Howard described *Cleaning Up* as “Douglas Adams-inspired”⁶, presumably on the grounds of the humorous premise. It also sounds like this description of a short Russian novel by Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii, “alien rubbish ... which poses awful dangers as well as promising fabulous rewards”⁷. The work was originally published as the souvenir book

⁵ SF Crowsnest, <http://www.computercrowsnest.com>

⁶ Book and Magazine Collector, # 148.

⁷ Anatomy of Wonder, Third Edition, 4-542.

for Novacon 17 where Iain was the guest of honour in November 1987.

An anthology called, *Twenty under Thirty-Five*, edited by Peter Straus, saw the first publication of *Road of Skulls*. This collection subtitled ‘Original stories by Britain’s best new young writers’ was published in 1988. With the stories arranged alphabetically by author, Iain’s was first.

Odd Attachment came from another themed anthology called *Arrows of Eros* and subtitled *Unearthly Tales of Love and Death*. Edited in 1989 by Alex Stewart for New English Library. The anthology apparently came about from a discussion in the bar at a writer’s conference. Where Iain got his idea for a story from the perspective of a plant is another matter.

Piece appeared in the **Observer Sunday Magazine** (13/08/89) with illustrations by Peter Knock, and in the contents is described as “a cautionary tale of coincidence and intolerance”. As it concerns the Rushdie affair and Lockerbie Iain expressed a fear [in May 1989] that it may not be published¹ but it was. It has been made into a radio play twice, the first broadcast on the BBC (see **Banksoniain** #1) and for the second see #5.

In the interview with David Garnett¹ the fact that Iain had promised the interviewer a story for a collection, *Zenith II*, was discussed. Iain admitted that there was a “list of half a dozen people who’ve asked for short stories”, adding, “I think you’re top”. This story never seems to have emerged, although the collection did, and no new short Banks fiction appears to have been published since *Piece*.

Foreign editions of the collection have been produced. The German edition from 1992 played up the Culture connection using *Ein Geschenk der Kultur* as the collection’s title. Whilst the French, *L’état des Arts*, and Italian, *Lo stato dell’arte*, editions from 1996 and 2001 respectively, kept to translations of the original title.

A US edition of the collection was finally published in 2004 by Night Shade Books, with the addition of the essay *A Few Notes on the Culture* which Ken MacLeod posted online for Iain back in 1994.

The Unwritten Banks

The Bridge Revisited

A recent article in **The Sunday Times** (27/03/05) mentioned the stage play of *The Bridge* which set me off on another round of research with the year of production and the name of the theatre company to help. Gary Lloyd's recently provided some extra information about his album inspired by the same book, so we return to the story of adaptations of Banks's most ambitious work that were first discussed in **Banksoniain #3**.

The Play

The Sunday Times article by Andrew Burnett in its Culture section was about adapting books for theatre productions and posed the question "Is a stage the place for novel ideas?". "There is no doubt that in the right hands an adapted novel can become a brilliant piece of theatre, but too many adaptations are bland, clumsily dramatised and even preposterous." He warned. "The accolade for most misguided adaptation must go to Edinburgh's Benchtours theatre group. Having enjoyed success with a piece based on Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, it chose to tilt at even more daunting windmills. *The Bridge* is arguably Iain Banks's best novel, but it doesn't belong on a stage." Andrew also related the result of asking Iain Banks himself about the production. "Couldn't make head nor tale of it," he replied, "and I wrote the bloody thing."

The production under discussion was the one by the Benchtours Theatre which premiered at the Old Fruitmarket on April 29th as part of the 1994 Glasgow Mayfest where it played until May 8th before a short tour around Scotland. It was directed by Jean-Frederic Messier, and adapted by John Harvey in conjunction with the cast.

The set was a reconstruction of the Forth Rail Bridge designed by Karen Tennent, and the lead role was played by Peter Clerke who is now the co-Artistic Director of the company along with Catherine Gillard who was also in the production. Music was by Pete Livingstone who is also listed as a performer. He also still works with the Benchtours

company, and all three have been involved with the latest production from the company, Michael Duke's political farce, *The Emperor's Opera*.

The other cast on the production were: John Cobb, Clark Crystal, Ralph Heggarty, Angela Laurier, and Rebecca Robinson. Costumes were by Hilary MacDonald, and the lighting designer was Louis Philippe Demers, with stage management by Louis Barrow, Gavin Boucher, and Angie Grant.

A contemporary review from **The Times** (03/05/94) by Jeremy Kingston who is still their theatre critic, was headed, "Deafened by a crashing bore" and began "After this grim beginning, Mayfest can only improve". He didn't seem to like the "knotty and arguably unrewarding novel" in the first place, and thought it had been turned into "an incomprehensible and punishing piece of theatre". Ian Black's preview in **The Sunday Times** (24/04/94) predicted that the audience may well be confused and remarked that "the script is touched with weirdness". He also picked out the fact that guest actress Angela Laurier is also a contortionist for comment, describing her performance as "gritty", and noting that she had been "nominated best actress for Puck in Robert Lepage's version of a *Midsummer Night's Dream*".

Other reviews, those quoted on the Benchtour's website, are more positive. **The Independent** said, "a highly impressive production, matching Iain Banks' dark and surreal vision with Benchtours' own assured imagery and technical bravado". Whilst **The Guardian** said, "The staging is stunningly inventive, astonishing acrobatics and explosive acting. The scale, originality and ambition of the project confirm Benchtours as a ground-breaking theatre company". **Scotland on Sunday** commented, "immensely strong and moving, full of insights into life, death, sex, Scotland and the miserable split between id and intellect that plagues western civilisation".

Whatever the reality, the two-hour production which was only performed twenty-one times at the Mayfest and on tour, sounds intriguing stuff.

The Album

Gary Lloyd's personal interpretation of *The Bridge* took the form of a 40 minute long CD that was released in 1997. Gary initially wrote to Iain about the work early in 1987, and Iain responded on a Viz postcard to set off a chain of correspondence that led to an invitation to the launch of *Espedair Street* later that year.

The interest for Iain, Gary's thinks, was partly based on the fact that Iain considers himself a frustrated musician and was interested in the music making process, and partly on Iain's fondness for *The Bridge*, it being his favourite novel.

The ten years that the production took from conception to fruition is down to Gary being "happily and productively distracted" by his job writing soundtrack music for films, TV, firework shows, modern ballet, etc., and "not laziness". This labour of love, Gary says, "set out to convey both the sense of the novel's journey through coma and dreams whilst at the same time illustrating the structure that the novel possesses" has been described by Iain as "a novel distilled down to a sort of narrative poem set to music".

There were forty or so instrument players in the ensemble to organise, which includes: a small choir, a team of handbell ringers, some opera singers, guitarists, percussionists, string players and mad electronica, as well as Iain.

Iain's voice part was recorded in 1995 in an Edinburgh studio called Ice Station Zebra, chosen because it had the right equipment, but also a good literary title. It turned out to be not the most salubrious of places, "a vision of my own personal studio hell", says Gary, and apparently a source of amusement to Iain to this day. Only about two-thirds of what was recorded then made the final album as Gary continued to refine the work, and some of Banks's vocal part dates from a short test session done in 1992 at a hotel in Manchester.

The album itself has been part of the subject of a doctoral thesis and several other degree studies. Gary notes that Iain once described *The Bridge* as "the one he says that left home and got a First" and he feels the same about

his version adding mine "got a Nobel Prize, and joined 'The Strokes' too".

An interesting adjunct to the album has been a couple of live performances based on its music. The first of these was a purely orchestral concert that took place at Cholmondeley Castle in Cheshire in 1996, where the Lloyd work based on the Banks book was sandwiched in between some Albinoni and Bach. Gary rewrote *The Awakening* for a string orchestra and it went under the title *Précis* as it was acting as a representative of the whole work.

Unlike Bach and Albinoni, Gary was there in person to introduce the piece to the audience which he found nerve-wracking. It went down very well, and Gary has plans to do a completely orchestral version of *The Bridge* someday, the score for *Précis* having only taken a few hours to prepare after the initial effort of creating the album music.

The second performance involved Iain himself. This was at the 1998 launch of another literary inspired work of Gary's, *Brought to Light*, based on the work by Alan Moore. Given the opportunity by the publishers Gary used the launch to have a performance event that ended up having to turn people away from the door of Telford's Warehouse, Chester.

Each of the works was edited down to around twenty minutes and both Alan and Iain performed their parts live, with Gary adding extra keyboards and percussion against the backing recording. After the performances there was a Q&A session. Gary was particularly grateful for Iain's attendance as it was just a few days after the Porsche incident recounted in *Raw Spirit*.

The Bridge CD is currently out of print, but will be re-released on a new label in a re-mastered edition next year. If you cannot wait until then, Gary is happy to produce one offs for a nominal cost. Drop us a line here and we will put you in touch with him.

Gary is just back from South Africa where he attended the première of a documentary he composed music for and had some interesting encounters with the local wildlife.

Critical Banks

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction

The last edition of this tome was published in 1999, authored by John Clute and Peter Nicholas. The former wrote the article about Banks, Iain M(enzie)s, although from the name of the books discussed, it looks as if it has not been updated since the 1993 edition.

Clute points out that although Banks ostensibly distinguishes between his ‘general’ and ‘sf’ with different names “those categories tend to merge”. He therefore discusses Banks’s first three (i.e. non-‘M’) novels, and comments that *Canal Dreams* “also stretches the nature of the mainstream novel by being set in AD2000”, which was, back then, in the future.

The Wasp Factory is noted for some surreal horror, but *Walking on Glass* is picked out as it “radically engages a mixture of genres”. Clute considers *The Bridge* to possibly be Banks’s “finest single novel”, highlighting the “hilarious parody of Sword-and-Sorcery convention”, before moving onto the works of Iain M Banks.

He notes that early versions of most of these were written before *The Wasp Factory* and are “conspicuously more holiday in spirit and open in texture”. However, the notion that they are just Space Opera is, he states, a “deceptive impression”. The fact that The Culture is genuinely post-scarcity is, he says, unusual for Space Opera.

The article then looks at the first four SF publications of Iain M Banks in turn offering pithy summaries and punchy assessments. He concludes that “for many readers and critics, Iain Banks/ Iain M Banks was the major new UK sf writer of the 1980s.”

Banks also gets a name check as one of the “notable sf ironists” in Peter Nicholls’s article called ‘Optimism and Pessimism’, along with the likes of Ballard, Bester, Moorcock and Wolfe. In Brian Stableford’s article on ‘Psychology’, *The Bridge* gets a mention.

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction; Orbit 1999. ISBN: 1857238974.

Banks in Translation

Finland, Finland, Finland

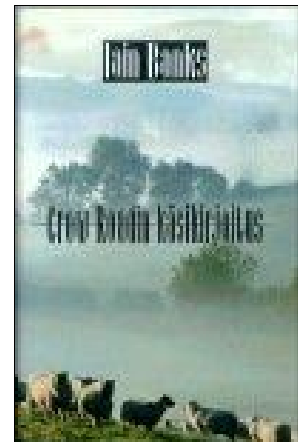
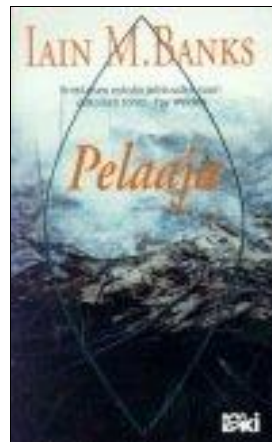
Finland was one of the first countries to get into Banks, with *Ampiaistehdas* (The Wasp Factory) being published in 1986 by Porvoo. Translated by Juhani Koskinen, and with a burning dog on cover illustration by Ilkka Pesonen.

It was, however, the only Banks title available up until 1993 when the publishing house Loki-Kirjat began to produce an eclectic mix of his works. They began with *Muista Flebasta* (Consider Phlebas) and *Pelaaja* (The Player of Games) in 1993 and 1994 respectively, and both translated by Ville Keynäs.

Kävelyä Lasilla (Walking on Glass) followed in 1997 with a trio of translators: Jonina Altschuler, Reetu Kurkjärvi and Topi Makkonen, the same year as *Aseiden Käyttö* (Use of Weapons) from the SF specialist Ville Keynäs. The next year saw the translation by Anu Partanen of *Crow Roadin Käsikirjoitus* (The Crow Road) which in 2005 was re-issued in a paperback edition.

In 2002 *Syällisyys* (Complicity) made its Finnish appearance translated by Inka Parpola, and last year *Tähystä Tuulenpuolta* (Look to Windward) translated by the paring of Lauri Mäkelä and Jari Virtanen was published. I do hope Ville is OK?

Loki-Kirjat has purchased the rights to *The Algebraist* which should be forthcoming, but I think the Finnish Culture fans must be screaming out for *Excession*.



Hugos There

A Commentary on the Awards

Looking back through the history of the Hugos, Banks books have previously been nominated but not made the top five runoff vote on three occasions. *Against a Dark Background* in 1994, *Feersum Endjinn* in 1995 and *Excession* in 1997 all had their champions but not enough to make the final ballot.

This may have something to do with the lag between his publication in the States and the UK. The Hugo awards have eligibility rules to do with when books were published in the US, with some caveats for books first published elsewhere. Thus after the British have enjoyed another Banks SF romp and feel it may be worthy of recognition, most Americans are unaware of its existence. *Feersum Endjinn* and *Excession* won the British Science Fiction Association award in 1995 and 1996 respectively whilst just registered as blips on the Hugo radar.

This year, although the majority of attendees at Worldcon will still be from the States the fact that it is being held in Glasgow perhaps means that the subset that did nominate in the Best Novel category, all 424 of us, could well have seen the Brits in a majority. Most of the other nominated books have been published in the US, but with the American edition of *The Algebraist* not appearing until after Worldcon, Iain faces an uphill struggle to win the award. Commentary on SF fan websites has suggested that Iain may, however, pick up votes for "his body of work" rather than for this particular book.

The two favourites look like being *Iron Council* which recently won the jury awarded Arthur C. Clarke award for China Miéville (beating fellow Hugo nominee Ian McDonald), and *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, which won Susanna Clarke the 2005 British Book Award prize in the Best Newcomer category. Miéville also won the Clarke in 2001 with *Perdido Street Station*, which had a Hugo nomination in 2002 followed by another in 2003 for *The Scar*. China can be heard occasionally presenting on the Radio 3 arts show *Night Waves*.

Susanna Clarke undertook an extensive worldwide signing tour when her first novel was published last year which topped the bestsellers lists on both sides of the Atlantic last autumn. It made many of 'Year's Best' lists for 2004, and was described, perhaps to its detriment, by the press as an adult Harry Potter. It is better than that.

Charles Stross has two of the five nominations in this year's Hugo novella category. *Singularity Sky* was nominated in the best novel category last year, and he also had novelette nominations in 2002, 2003 and 2004, clearly indicating an award voting following. He also has more of his books published in the US than the UK which is probably a good thing given the expected voter profile, as is his regular presence in US based short story magazines.

River of Gods author Ian McDonald has been publishing as long as Banks, being one of the five nominees for the 1985 John W. Campbell Best New Writer award. He went on to win the 1992 Philip K. Dick award with *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day*, the 1993 BSFA short fiction award for *Innocents*, and the 2001 Sturgeon (another short fiction award) for *Tendeléo's Story*.

Whoever wins it will be a day of recognition for British SF/Fantasy writing when the announcement is made at the ceremony that is being hosted by Kim Newman and Paul McAuley on August 7th.

Banks, as already noted, has won the BSFA award twice. Interestingly in 1995 *Feersum Endjinn* beat, amongst other things, *Necroville* by Ian McDonald. Apart from a Clarke nomination in 1991 for *Use of Weapons* he has generally been ignored by English language prize-givers, but seen more appreciation in translation.

He has won the German language Kurd Laßwitz Preis for best foreign novel four times: *The Bridge* (1991), *The Wasp Factory* (1992), *Use of Weapons* (1993) and *Excession* (1998). The last of these also took the Italia for 1998 making it Banks's most honoured work, and it was also nominated in the 1997 British Fantasy awards.

Media Scanner, contd.

On his semi-regular review slot on 6Music (26/02/05) Banks revealed that he has now flown solo, that his favourite track is, *Since I've Been Loving You*, from Led Zeppelin 3, and that thinking about the next book will start in the summer, and writing in October. Banks explained on his next appearance (17/04/05) that his flying lessons take longer as he now has to attend navigational briefings. He also commented that he would be abseiling from the Forth Bridge the next morning for charity, and mentioned Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland.

Another possible pointer to the Hugos, could well be the Locus reader poll. This is the annual event carried out by the US based magazine. The voting deadline was May 1st, with the results due to be announced at the Westercon in July. The top five contenders in each category have been made public. In the Best SF Novel category, *The Algebraist* is there alongside *Iron Sunrise*. *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* is in the Best First Novel category and *Iron Council* in the Best Fantasy Novel, so four of the five Hugo nominees are represented.

Banks has never before made the top five although he has appeared on the Locus list six times before. *Look to Windward* was his highest placed book at #7 on the 2001 survey.

Things to look out for

The attendee list for this year's Worldcon in Glasgow does not currently include Iain M. Banks, but as he is nominated for the Best Novel award, and only lives a short train ride away he may pop in. Details at: <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk>

The Edinburgh Book Festival runs from 13th – 29th August this year with the line up due to be made public in June. Will Banks make his usual appearance? The 'Best Scottish Book of All Time' announcement will be made at the book festival on August 27th, so remember to vote, see page # 3.

Tickets will be available from June 17th. See: <http://www.edbookfest.co.uk>

eBayWatch

Want a ready made Banks collection? Try eBay. A particularly interesting lot recently offered was a fully signed set of Banks's first twenty novels, everything except *The Algebraist*.



This lot sold for £549 with just a single bidder, but then one is enough, and items are worth what people will pay for them. The most basic of UK postage was another £20 on top of that, and I would have wanted it insured as well. To me buying a complete set takes much of the fun out of the hobby of building a collection over time and the sheer joy of wandering round secondhand book shops and finding the bargains you are looking for as well as discovering books and authors you have never heard of.

This was closely followed onto the market by a complete set of the ten SF books of Iain M. Banks, although just two of the set, and those being later works, were signed and *The Player of Games* was not a first printing. The starting price was £180 but no bid was forthcoming.

The Banksoniain is available as a PDF from <http://www.banksoniain.netfirms.com/> If you have any corrections, comments, suggestions or contributions then email us at: banksoniain@yahoo.co.uk

Guardian Quiz Answer: Wasps. See page #3.

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