

# The Banksoniain #8

## An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

November 2005

### Editorial

Issue #8 marks somewhat of a departure from the normal **Banksoniain** with a new (for us) writer, Martyn Colebrook, taking up the challenge of the book biography centre spread.

The diversity that makes up the Strange Worlds of Iain (M) Banks is I believe pretty much illustrated by the contents of this issue. As well as the book biography focus on *Canal Dreams*, we have news of his forthcoming books, his Culture novels being a specialist subject on the TV quiz show, Mastermind, an academic conference being planned about his work, and more.

There is a fair bit of Banks related Worldcon news to catch up on and we also have a personal view from Iain Banks Forum regular Coercri as well as a few thoughts from your editor.

We also have brought back a popular regular column, travelling half way round the world to uncover a Not "THE" Iain Banks in New Zealand (although he does turn out to be Scottish). Meanwhile **Banks in Translation** heads over to the Baltic States examining at his impact over there, and **eBayWatch** looks at an interest bit of advertising.

At Novacon, an annual weekend convention in the Birmingham area, **The Banksoniain** was included in the vote for the best fanzine award that is announced at the convention each year. More on this on the back page.

This issue's publication is a little later than the middle of the month release we try to aim for, but it is the full dozen pages unlike the last one, and real life occasionally gets in the way. Thanks for this issue go to Martyn, Coercri and, of course, Iain M Banks himself. See you next year.

### Banks's Next Books

Details of the 2006 vintage Banks have begun to become available, with listings starting to appear on Amazon and the like as Little, Brown, the publisher, makes pre-publication information available about the work *Untitled Iain Banks*.

The various ISBNs that are floating about are: 0316731056 for the hardback; 0316731064 for the trade paperback (the one you will find in airport bookshops) and 1405501251 for the CD audio-book abridgement. These all have the same prospective release date being September 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, and somehow Amazon manage, whilst Iain is still writing the book, to claim that it will be 416 pages long. These pieces of information should probably be taken in descending order of credibility.

The further books of his current three book deal should tentatively be expected around mid 2007 and early 2009.

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### Publication News

Meanwhile back in the world of books that physically exist. The US edition of *The Algebraist* shipped in late September. Well the limited edition did but the standard hardback is still listed as forthcoming. See: <http://www.nightshadebooks.com>

In the world of literary criticism a major article on Banks is due to be published in the next edition of **Chapman Magazine**, issue #108. The 5,000 word piece in what is subtitled "Scotland's Quality Literary Magazine" has been written by Edmund O'Connor and covers both mainstream and science fiction. It should be out about Christmas time, and other features in this issue include an interview with Ian Rankin. Advance orders can be made via: [chapman-pub@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:chapman-pub@blueyonder.co.uk)

## Media Scanner

**Scotland on Sunday** (24/07/05) had various writers including Banks comment on the new direction in Irvine Welsh's work. Iain, described as author of *The Crow Road* and *Complicity*, said: "It can get boring having to be edgy and hip all the time sometimes you want to do other things. So I think it is good for Irvine Welsh if he wants to do something a bit more mainstream. I wouldn't take it that this is a new direction for perpetuity. It might only last for one book. I would be surprised if Irvine writes himself into a corner, he is too smart for that."

For **The Independent** (05/08/05) Ed Caesar compiled a list of twenty-five literary location in Edinburgh which included the Grassmarket as featured in *Complicity* which mentions The Last Drop and its proximity to an un-named Indian restaurant.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament published an advertisement in **The Independent** (06/08/05) marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and asking that such things never happen again. It was paid for and signed by many people whose names were listed on the advert. One of these was Iain Banks.

**The Daily Mail**, through Jeremy Hodges, recommended Iain's talk at the Edinburgh International Book Festival on the 19th in an article (15/08/05) which said: "Those who go to see Banks at the Book Festival will find him a thoroughly nice chap, on the surface quite ordinary and approachable. It's only when you see into his head that you realise why he remains one of the most astonishingly inventive and imaginative creative talents in Scotland today."

Sam Dunn in the Business section of the **Independent** (21/08/05) had an eye-catching opening sentence: "Iain Banks or inheritance tax? For preferred holiday reading, that's not a tough one. Few are the sunseekers who jet off with a book about personal finance."

Iain's political comments at the events made the news with **The Scotsman** (22/08/05) reporting: "In the Imprisoned Writers event,

Ian Holding (not his real name) said how glad and sad he was to hear Iain Banks's vitriolic denunciation of Tony Blair the previous night. "In Zimbabwe, I couldn't say that and live the next day."

Charles Stross interviewed by **Crows Nest** (01/09/05) was asked about trends in SF and commented: "Certainly Iain Banks triggered a renewed interest in space opera with his culture novels in the late 80s, and a lot of us are still working through the implications. Beyond that, though, it becomes hard to discuss trends with any certainty." See: <http://www.computercrownsnest.com>

The closure of Andromeda, an SF bookshop in Birmingham which was apparently the world's oldest, was covered by the newspapers of that city, the **Evening Mail** (20/09/05) and **Post** (21/09/05) both mentioned Iain Banks in their stories. The latter put banks in the company of Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett, Gerry Anderson and Isaac Asimov, whilst the former recalled the move to three units in Suffolk Street "opened with a fanfare by Terry Pratchett, Iain M Banks and David Gemmell".

Some Scottish author confusion was reported by Andrew Pierce in **The Times** (09/09/05). Ian Rankin won best author at the GQ Men of the Year Awards and was congratulated by "a fellow diner accosted him to say that he [Rankin] was his second favourite writer, after McEwan. 'He went on to discuss my science fiction efforts,' Rankin said, 'at which point I realised he was confusing me with Iain Banks.'" Banks tells his story of being mistaken for Rankin at a distillery in *Raw Spirit*.

A bizarre analogy was used by Amanda Mitchison in an interview with Jane Asher (03/10/05) in the **Daily Telegraph**, when the discussion reached her novels which are apparently not the sort of thing you expected from the famous-for-cake-baking actress: "When *The Longing* was published the press behaved as if Martha Stewart had secretly penned all the Iain Banks novels." Martha Stewart is the American head of a corporation built on her cooking, gardening and entertaining (although she then went to jail for perjury over an allegation of insider dealing).

Stephen Hawking's book *A Brief History of Time* famously only includes the equation  $E = mc^2$  as he was advised that each equation would cut the readership by half. I am hoping that **Banksoniain** readers are made of sterner stuff as I am recommending those who like to think a bit deeper about his SF to read a four page article by Dr. Richard Kennaway that has quite a few equations in its discussion of *Dynamics of Iain M. Banks' Orbitals*. It is still in a draft form and Richard wants to get some illustrations to brighten it up a bit. He wrote it just for fun after and would be happy to receive any comments on the piece from interested readers. The paper is available to download from:

<http://www.cmp.uea.ac.uk/~jrk/distribution/orbital.pdf>

**Newsday** (14/10/05) reported that the Franz Ferdinand member Alex Kapranos looked to dramas like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *The Wasp Factory* as inspiration. It looks like he did mean the theatrical version rather than the original novel, and given that he is from the Glasgow area may well have seen the version at the Citizen's Theatre.

In the Scottish edition of **The Sunday Times** (16/10/05) it was reported that Iain and other authors were backing the writers-in-residence project that has been set up in Edinburgh as part of the city's World City of Literature celebrations. Although Iain is too busy to take up a position eight writers will be 'in residence' at locations as diverse as shops, prisons and care homes around the city.

Pat Gibson winning Mastermind after using The Culture novels as a specialist subject in the semi-final provoked a slew of coverage. Articles mentioning the Banks connection appeared in **The Mirror** and **The Evening Standard** (09/11/05) followed by **The Sun**, **The Independent**, the **Daily Telegraph**, **The Times**, **The Daily Mail** and **The Birmingham Post** (10/11/05). See also page #4.

Iain's appearances as a guest reviewer on the BBC 6Music show, Marc Riley's Rocket Science, seem to be less frequent than they were. Unless I have missed some then they

now about once every two months rather than once very month.

Iain complained of having been busy and away on September 24th which had interrupted his flying lessons and so he was going to just keep it ticking over until Spring and then get back to it seriously. Presumably this will be after he has delivered the next book and he and his publishers have made any editorial changes. Reviews of *The Fall*, *Beta Band*, and *Francoise Breut* then followed.

Banks also appeared on November 12th to review albums from Jim Noir, Jeffrey & Jack Lewis, and Sun Kill Moon. They indulged a little banter before the reviews and Iain revealed he was hard at work "thinking and planning the next novel". Marc also mentioned "that guy" on Mastermind, and Iain said that he [Pat Gibson] had got more answers right that he had himself, although he did get right the one that Pat had got wrong. From that Marc moved onto obsessive fans and asked Banks if he ever worried about them. Iain replied that as the author of *The Wasp Factory* and *Complicity* he had nothing to worry about as he could think of much nastier things to do to his fans than his fans could think of. They then moved onto the record reviewing.

A letter appeared in edition #2526 (the one dated 19th November) of **New Scientist** from Iain Banks of North Queensferry, Fife. It commented on the change in tack that Creationists have made in promoting their views: "Symbolically, reason has already triumphed in the debate over intelligent design. The faith-based side has shifted from using the term "creationism" to using "intelligent design". So their argument has...evolved."

**The Times** (19/11/05) added *The Crow Road* to its Book Group list. An accompanying article by Alyson Rudd began: "This is a novel about growing up, falling in love, friendships, family and death; the stuff, in fact, of so many novels. However, this book stands apart. It is particularly well written and Iain Banks expertly juggles humour with tragedy."

# Mastermind

The BBC quiz show featured a contestant with a specialised subject of “The Culture novels of Iain M Banks.” For those unfamiliar with the show it is based on the interrogation technique of sitting the person in a dark room and shining a light on them whilst asking questions. Each contestant has two two minute rounds one of a subject of their choice and one on general knowledge

The contestant was Patrick Gibson and he is well known in quizzing circles being the fourth million pound winner on Who Wants To Be A Millionaire in April 2004. He was apparently lined up to appear on the 2004 series of Mastermind, but the BBC has a policy of not using contestants who have been on other shows recently and so was held over until the 2005 series.

On his first Mastermind appearance his specialist subject was ‘Films Directed by Quentin Tarantino’ and he scored 18 points on that, followed by another 15 in the general knowledge round. He won that heat and so progressed to the next with the highest score of all the players in the first round. It was his semi-final appearance that saw him utilise his knowledge of The Culture. He scored 16 points only getting the answer to one of the questions he was asked wrong - #11. In his general knowledge round he scored another 17 points to impressively move into the final.

In the final Mr Gibson took the television show *Father Ted* as his specialised subject, and became the champion.

The Culture questions (answers of page #11) he was asked were:

- 1) What is the name of the Culture's espionage and dirty tricks section, of which Diziet Sma is an agent?
- 2) In the game of Azad, what is the name of the first of the three main playing boards?
- 3) In *Inversions* what type of creature is the Protector hunting when he himself narrowly escapes being shot?
- 4) What is the name of the city on Ea which in *The Player Of Games* Gurgeh describes as having all the planning of a bird dropping?

5) In *Excession* the MSV 'Not Invented Here' belongs to which class (the first type of GSV) in template of the very large, fast, self sufficient ship concept?

6) What is the name of the Culture's all-covering sentient suits which have a node-distributed brain and which are able to keep their wearer comfortable in the most extreme of environments?

7) In *Use Of Weapons* which planet was Zakalwe beheaded on, seconds before being rescued by the Culture?

8) What is the full name of the laser weapons which are known to the Culture as CREWs?

9) From which poem are the titles of the two Culture novels *Consider Phlebas* and *Look To Windward* taken?

10) In *The State Of The Art* what type of car is Sma given to drive from the orbiting space craft Arbitrary to Paris?

11) In *Inversions* what, according to Dr. Vossil, is the only sin?

12) In *Look To Windward* what is the name of the demilitarised Rapid Offensive Unit which takes Quilan on the last leg of his journey to Masag'?

13) Which synthetic language, designed to be as phonetically and philosophically expressive as possible, is the common language of the Culture?

14) In *Excession* what type of alien does Genar-Hofoen ask to become as part of his fee for carrying out his mission for Special Circumstances?

15) What is the theme for the fancy dress party that Zakalwe (as Mr. Staberinde) is invited and which takes place in a boathouse cellar in *Use Of Weapons*?

16) In *Consider Phlebas* what message from the Dra'Azon of Schaar's World does Horza repeat after he has inspected the tunnels on the planet?

17) In *Use Of Weapons* the remote drone of the Xenophobe normally looks like a cute furry animal. What does it come to the fancy dress party as?

## Banks in Translation

### The Baltic States

Estonia, topmost of the Baltic States (which handily go in alphabetical order from north to south), has the most active literature translation business of all three. Five Banks titles have been published in Estonia, and the rights to a sixth have been sold. The first work published was *Mõtle Phlebasest* (Consider Phlebas) published by Varrak in 1998 and translated by Rein Turu who went on to do *Mangur* (The Player of Games) and *Relvade Kasutus* (Use of Weapons) for the same company in 2000 and 2001 respectively. The cover art for the first two M works were drawn by Arbo Tammiksaar, with the third by Anneli Navi. Each of these is done an understated semi-abstract sort of a way. Estonia has good book cover artists.

The non M work begins as usual with *Herilase Vabrik* (The Wasp Factory) published by an outfit called Olion in 1999. The translation is by Siiri Sau, and the cover by Tiina Sildre which shows a young person's face with an eye peeking through a hand covering it in such close up detail that it leaves the viewer to read as much into the image as they want to. Tiina incidently has also done four Douglas Adams covers for the same publisher. Another company, Byronet published *Äri* (The Business) in 2002 translated by Maria Drevs. It seems they also have the rights to *Complicity*.

Latvia seems to suffer from a complete lack of Banks translations, although you can get the Harry Potter series.

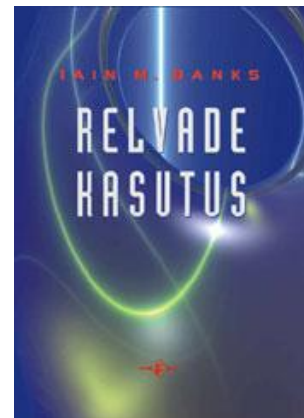
So moving onto Lithuania, we find it fares only slightly better. The only Banks work available is an edition of *Širšiu Fabrikas* (The Wasp Factory). This was translated in 1999 by Saulius Repecka and published by Lietuvos Rasytoju Sajungos Leidykla.

In the adjacent column we showcase some of the cover art. The Estonian cover for The Business is very plain and white and so not suited for reproduction here.

## Baltic Covers



Above, Arbo Tammiksaar's cover art for Iain M Banks, and below Anneli Navi's Use of Weapons



Below, two different takes on The Wasp Factory. On the left the Estonian cover by Tiina Sildre, and on the right the Lithuanian edition.



# Canal Dreams

by Martyn Colebrook

Iain Banks' fifth mainstream novel was published in 1989. Sabine Durrant<sup>1</sup> in **The Times** observed that 'while the conventional horror story is steered by a certain satisfying predictability, Banks seems determined to shock and subvert on every page.', whilst Anthony Quinn<sup>2</sup> suggested that *Canal Dreams* 'stalks a phantasmagoric terrain, but the dreamscapes which this book depicts have a more explosive, horror-show feel to them.' Even more effusive was **The Sunday Times** paperback review<sup>3</sup> which eulogised that 'Apocalyptic is the first word that springs to mind to describe this violent and powerful novel in which Banks once again demonstrates his extraordinary dark powers of imagination ... impressive'.

With *Canal Dreams*, Iain Banks returns to a number of ideas present in his earlier novels and anticipates later works in both his speculative and conventional fiction. Arguably the most striking is the use of the Avenging Angel, who appeared in *The Wasp Factory* and is later found in *Against A Dark Background*; the foreignness and intensity of the vivid dreams that intersect with the lead character's past experiences; the familiar trope of a violated and defiled character exacting a bloodthirsty and violent revenge, which is later seen in *Complicity*.

*Canal Dreams* is contextualised by an embittered Latin American civil war that impounds three ships in the Panama Canal. This choice of location and topic, namely the provocative and subversive activities undertaken by US militia as they interfere in a trade-centred conflict within South American politics, simply reinforces the global focus and overt political commentary that is resonant within Iain Banks' oeuvre. This is evident when the English seafarers involved in the history of ownership in this region are referred to as 'Francis Drake and his gang of licensed pirates' and the US President of the

time, Jimmy Carter, is reduced to the distinctly derogatory title of 'Pineapple Face'.

The protagonist of *Canal Dreams* is Hisako Onada, a Japanese cellist of prodigious ability who suffers from a chronic fear of flying. She has been invited to perform in a series of concerts throughout Europe but, despite the objections raised by her manager, Mr. Oriyaki, and the serious logistical difficulties it poses, she chooses to sail to the mainland instead of travelling by aeroplane. Her lover, Phillipe, is a young Frenchman who captains a tanker named *Le Cercle* that is also unable to leave the Canal. In an effort to ease the atmosphere of uncertainty, boredom and pessimistic malaise that has set in, both Hisako and Phillipe spend their days diving, dining and observing the activities of the various militias who are vying for supremacy in the region. The couple are joined on the boat by a series of other characters comprising different nationalities but the most intriguing is a brash young American named Steve Orrick who is working his passage out of Panama City on *Le Cercle*.

*Canal Dreams* is divided into three sections titled 'Demurrage', 'Casus Belli' and 'Force Majeure' and the relationship between the events in these sections and the Hisako's musical metier offers a further dimension to this most intriguing of novels. In 'Demurrage', Banks uses mesmerising, meditative language that imitates the torrid, tense political climate: 'crumpled grey landscape fading slowly into the gloom', 'freedom with its own many and precise rules – of times and depths, atmospheres and experience', 'thickness of the underwater light', 'monotonous ubiquity of the grey mud', 'the sense of placelessness, of being contained and cut off yet somehow free as well'. Such images convey the heavy, lethargic nature that accompanies an absence of movement in a place free from rigid temporal and chronological constraints, each moment merging. He intersperses these languid scenes with a sequence of dreams that have a ritualised, classical resonance and seem to reflect Hisako's sense of helplessness and frustration with the stasis in which she is trapped, as well as the growing discontent and

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<sup>1</sup> August 31<sup>st</sup> 1989.

<sup>2</sup> October 15<sup>th</sup> 1989.

<sup>3</sup> July 29<sup>th</sup> 1990.

disillusionment that she suffered previously as a student of the Hong Kong Academy.

The second section, 'Casus Belli', begins just as the group known ostensibly as 'People's Liberation Front of Panama' declare Hisako's group to have been 'liberated'. This group posit themselves as a factional militia who are attempting to force a resolution to the conflict through force rather than negotiation and view taking hostages as the most effective method. Their commander, Sucre, underestimates the potential for rebellion amongst his prisoners and promptly undertakes a bloody reprisal when a group led by Steve Orrick manage to obtain weaponry and grenades before launching their own assault. In the course of this escape attempt, Hisako demonstrates her physical capabilities by using basic martial arts techniques and calculated violence to attack Sucre, but the escape attempt fails and many of the group, including Steve Orrick, are murdered.

This section is the fulcrum of *Canal Dreams* in terms of structure and narrative. In contrast to 'Demurrage', the narrative pace switches to that of an espionage thriller, filled with 'Bond-like bravado' and 'convincingly marrying fantasy and reality' (Financial Times). Hisako is requested to perform a concert for Earl Dandridge, the sinister and spectral figure lurking in the background of this militia but after playing her first piece, she breaks the cello bow in defiance of his requests. This is followed by a strangely disruptive series of recollections detailing how she killed a policeman during a student protest against Vietnam and her experiences of returning to Hiroshima after the Atomic Bomb had been dropped. As she attacks the policeman, the language reveals that she has lost control of her actions and is engaging in an almost frenzied bestial attack: 'She stabbed at his throat with her fingers, instantly furious, beyond all reason or normality, the pressure of all her frustration hammering her bones and flesh into his neck.' This can be paralleled with the violence that ensues after she correctly identifies Earl Dandridge's group as CIA-inspired agent provocateurs who have been instructed to commit a terrorist act that will be presumed to be the work of Panamanian militias. This attack

against Western diplomats will automatically offer the US an appropriate motive for the subsequent invasion and recapture of the Panama Canal. As she is returned from Earl Dandridge, a second rebellion takes place and in the midst of this clash between authority and insurgency, realises she will be raped.

Section three is titled 'Force Majeur', opening with the aftermath of the Vietnam riot and Hisako's rehabilitation after the brutality that she has endured. This is juxtaposed with the destruction of her cello (by the CIA Group) and the gang-rape she is subjected to. At one point following the cello being shot, Hisako notes that 'Old wood. New metal. Guess which won? No surprise there. Killed, she was free' and this suggests that she finds the discipline of music a constraint or restriction on her personal expression. Her refusal to acknowledge the cello's destruction can be interpreted as nonchalance, determination or relief but as she is raped in the subsequent narrative, Hisako is able to distance herself from the pain and the humiliation, observing absurdity and humour in a sequence of memories from her student life. My consideration is that Hisako's freedom from her musical restraint also creates a breakdown in the personal boundaries that allow her to distinguish between retributive violence and the murderous, rage-filled, revenge that is enacted in this final section. Hisako's systematic destruction of her attackers is portrayed with Iain Banks' characteristically inventive yet darkly sadistic poise. Particularly satisfying is her 'ring of fire' murder, setting fire to the oil-sodden canal with a flare whilst a crew of soldier frantically attempt to escape their Gemini boat.

Interestingly, Hisako's different histories begin to intersect once more as she murders the remaining soldiers and it becomes apparent that her violence towards the Americans is inspired by an awareness of the atrocities that have been perpetrated by the Americans towards Vietnam and Japan. Hisako's father is revealed to have died before she was born, his death caused by a tumour from the Hiroshima blast, therefore engaging with a number of political themes that can be seen in later works, such as *Complicity* and *The Algebraist*.

## Canal Dreams Obscura

With Martyn writing the 'Book Biography' (see centre spread) I will drop a few of my own observations about the work into the Obscura section.

Iain has commented that the book was meant to be a political thriller but as the politics could easily be removed then it probably doesn't work exactly as it should<sup>4</sup>. It is also the book that he confessed to having the most difficulty getting started<sup>5</sup> expressing the view that writing in hope of publication is one thing, but "when you know that your career and mortgage depend on it, that's another".

The difficulties that he had resulted in much of the book being written whilst under the influence of large amounts of whisky, and it is his least favourite book. However, he also notes that whenever he says this at a public appearance there is usually at least one person whose face drops and he knows that even if they don't say so it is probably their favourite of his.

It is very unlikely that the book will be made into a film. When it was published it was set in the future, but that period (the year 2000) has now been and gone. Iain has also commented that he would only entrust it to a director such as Oliver Stone as it would be very easy to get the politics wrong and make a pro-CIA film which Mr Stone would not do<sup>4</sup>. Banks's agent, Mic Cheetham was later quoted as saying that Iain refuses to sell the rights<sup>6</sup>.

There was a possibility that the book could have been made into an opera. Malcolm Sutherland, who directed the theatrical production of *The Wasp Factory*, apparently expressed an interest in turning it into an opera, which Iain mentioned in an interview with Matthias Penzel in June 1995.

*Canal Dreams* has not been issued as an audiobook, although there has been a musical

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mary Branscombe, SFX, June 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Tim Metcalf, GM Magazine, vol.2 no. 3.

<sup>6</sup> The Culture Fanzine, issue #7.

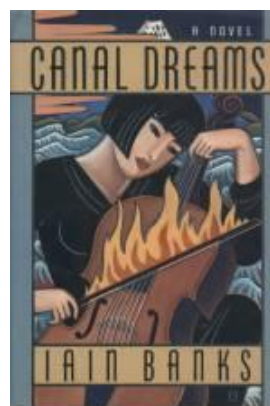
track, called *Dreaming*, that includes Iain reading an extract of it. It is on the album *Next Wave* by the radio DJ Chris Coco. According to Coco's website it took six takes to record Iain's bit. The album also has a contribution from Monica Queen who sang Christine's parts in the BBC radio adaptation of *Espedair Street*.

The album details for this track are: *Dreaming* programmed, played and produced by Chris Coco written by C Mellor / I Banks published by Edel / Copyright Control additional keyboards by Sacha Puttnam vocals by Iain Banks vocals recorded by Alan Mawdsley at Soho Recording Studios, London.

CD: Distinct'ive (2002) DISNCD78.

Vinyl: Distinct'ive (2002) DISNLP78.

A US edition of *Canal Dreams* appeared in 1991 published by Doubleday with an Art Deco inspired cover by Anne Bascove.



Translations of the book have been published in Germany, Turkey and Russia.

One (sort of) spin off from *Canal Dreams* has been the writing career of Ken MacLeod. Ken admitted in an interview with Andrew Adams<sup>7</sup> that he travelled to London for the launch of his friend's latest book, and during the party was accosted by a friend of Iain's who told him how annoyed Iain was hearing about all the ideas that Ken had for books but with Ken never actually writing them. The day after Ken decided that he would really write seriously launching into some short stories that never sold before embarking on novels.

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<sup>7</sup> Emerald City – Wiscon 24 Special, May 2000.

## Banks at Worldcon

Worldcon is considered the highlight of the science fiction convention calendar. The 63<sup>rd</sup> Worldcon took place in Glasgow in early August, the first time it has been held outside North America for a decade (when it was last in the UK). The World Science Fiction Society Awards (otherwise known as Hugos after the editor of many science fiction magazines Hugo Gernsback) are awarded at the convention and Iain's latest has been nominated.

*The Algebraist* was a creditable third in the Best Novel category. In this the final award of the night there were 543 ballots cast. The Hugo's operate on an 'Instant Runoff Ballot' system which involves having a transferable vote with the voter allowed to rank as many of the candidates they wish to in order. The bottom placed candidate is eliminated in each round and their votes redistributed to alternative preferences (if so indicated). The full figures are released after the announcements have been made at the award ceremony. Iain was in a strong third on first preference votes, and after the redistributions from *Iron Council* (China Meiville) and *Iron Sunrise* (Charles Stross), *The Algebraist* was eliminated through being four votes behind *River of Gods* (Ian MacDonald) and fifty behind the eventual winner *Jonathon Strange and Mr Norrell* (Susanna Clarke). For the minor places, once a higher position has been decided that book is removed from the voting and the process rerun. *The Algebraist* only just lost out to second place to *River of Gods* - the final showdown being 223 to 221. The third place result was reasonably secure the figures being 228 to 216 against *Iron Council*.

A surprising turn of events was disclosed on the release of the nomination voting. This was that if Terry Pratchett had not refused the nomination for *Going Postal* then *The Algebraist* would not have made the runoff ballot for the top five nominated books. Mr Pratchett's stated reason was that he wanted to have a relaxing convention and not to be bothered by the hassles of being a nominee. Iain avoided this by only turning up for one day. The refusal made it very close for the final position on the ballot and Iain just edged

out his friend Ken MacLeod's book *Newton's Wake* by one nomination, with another friend M John Harrison next with his novel *Light*. At the nomination stage Jonathon Strange was the runaway leader with 96 nominations followed by *Iron Sunrise* (55), *Going Postal* (54), *Iron Council* (46), *River of Gods* (37) *The Algebraist* (32). In total the 424 nominators produced a list of 230 titles for the best novel of the year.

The Hugo for Best Related Book (i.e. a non-fiction work that concerns SF) went to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (ISBN: 0521816262). The twenty chapters includes one by the critic and author John Clute on 'Science Fiction from 1980 to present' and another Gary Westfahl on 'Space Opera', both of which include mentions of the work of Iain M Banks.

As previously noted Iain just turned up on one day, the Sunday which happened to be the day the Hugos were presented. He did a signing at the Orbit stand in the Dealer's Room, and was also a late replacement for an indisposed Robert Rankin in doing a reading for the Young Adult Fun Activities programming stream. He read to a large group from a Harry Potter book in what was his only official appearance at the event.

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## Your Editor at Worldcon

On a Banks related note I went along to his signing which was one of the busiest I saw. I had a copy of the paperback of *The Algebraist* defaced and dated (just in case he won a Hugo for it the same day). In the fan room I had picked up a copy of an old edition of the fanzine **Critical Wave** which had a short article about Iain. I got that inscribed as well with what Iain called "the full Menzies" version of his signature and later noticed that it had previously been signed by John Brunner.

At the Sproutlore party I bumped into Anna Feruglio Dal Dan who had translated some of Iain's work into Italian. I interviewed Anna by email for **Banksoniain** #2 when we looked at Italian translations. I recognised her face from her blog, but it was nice to put a height to the real person and have a quick chat.

## Coercri at Worldcon

So the boy and I decided on the spur of the moment to visit this party, although that possibility had been hovering for a few days. We were sort of disappointed that we couldn't travel there on Glasgow's Clockwork Orange, which would have been very appropriate, but mainline train was ok and fast from the City Centre: 2 stops only. If you're a visitor to Glasgow, don't try to walk it from the centre...it'll take ages.

We arrived at the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre on a spectacularly sunny day with the campus of the SECC, the Armadillo, the Science Centre and the Moat House Hotel looking resplendent in the backdrop of the River Clyde. (It transpired that the site and its buildings featured not only in one of the main exhibits but also on guests' pass badges.)

Right from the start visitors were invited to participate in a whole other experience, and join the space flights from Glasgow SpaceCon. The main building was buzzing with folks, many an ageing hippy with enlarged forehead and pony-tail and a variety of colourful and exotic costumes. I never did get to see Captain Kirk though. (I felt more at home though when I espied free copies of **The Banksoniain** amongst the info leaflets, trade bump, and fan fiction).

Registration was a complex and lengthy process, which is a paradox of modern technology. We registered our personal details with one guy and his computer, got passed to another guy and his computer to pay our dosh (you want to pay with real money, not plastic?) and finally another who's computer issued our uniquely ID'd pass badges.

Two main halls of the SECC were given over to the expo: one for exhibits and one for dealers and artists (but none with any Red Leb). In the Exhibits hall, The TARDIS and The Stargate stood head and shoulders above the rest as far as I was concerned. I wanted to go inside The TARDIS, but this was a no go area. Costumes from movies, TV series and other expos completed this exhibit along with actual Hugos (would Banksie win this year?)

in cases and in vivo to admire and walk amongst.

In the Dealers and Artists hall, there was a huge variety of artwork to look at, admire, touch and bid on. The highlight for me was the original and large (24" by 36") by Jim Burns of the Green and the Grey, looking spectacular in its original oils. So spectacular was this that we risked our very souls by breaking exhibition policy to take a picture on phone-cam.

We had checked all the exhibits, seen the walking treats of costume, therefore decided we should attend a lecture. We decided on 'Art, Media and Speculative Fiction' to be given by 3 PhDs. Unfortunately 2 pulled out at the last minute, leaving a bewildered OU doctor to discuss the links between Babylon 5 and The Roman Empire. Discretion proved the better part of valour and we snuck out before falling asleep. Shame really, as the boy just achieved a 2.1 Joint Hons in English Lit and Media Studies, and we missed out on Arthurian Legend and the British Dystopian Vision (a theme close to the hearts of Banksie readers?).

Being spur of the moment, rather than planned, I think unfortunately we missed what looked like the highlight of the Con, namely 'Lucas Back in Anger' This was a play done by amateur dramatists (as the programme proclaimed, with more amateurism than drama) and spectacular special effects (it's amazing what you can do with a bit of cardboard and a lot of imagination). The play proudly announced to cover all 6 Star Wars episodes in one hour. Wish I had gone on Friday instead of Saturday.

Many things about the Con upset me mildly: the cost, the program (written in Marian or something) and the overly zealous badge checkers; but ya know what? The folks made it work good. There was a good vibe throughout which it would have taken at least a blast from a Lazy Gun or a nuke to dissipate. I'd try anything twice.

[Eastercon 2006 is up in Glasgow so maybe Coercri will pop along to that. I hope to make it and finally get over to visit Espedair Street. Drop me a line if you are going too. Ed.]

## Mastermind Answers

The answers to the Mastermind questions (which appear on page #4) are:

- 1) Special Circumstances
- 2) The Board of Origin
- 3) An ort
- 4) Groasnachek
- 5) Desert
- 6) Gel suits
- 7) Fohls
- 8) Coherent Radiation Emission Weapons
- 9) The Wasteland
- 10) Red Volvo estate
- 11) Selfishness
- 12) Resistance Is Character Forming
- 13) Marain
- 14) An Affronter
- 15) Injury
- 16) "There is death here"
- 17) A fish in a sphere of water

A reminder that Iain Banks should be appearing on the celebrity version of Mastermind, with a specialist subject of whisky. Last year these special programmes were broadcast between Christmas and New Year, so check listings around those dates.

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## Not "THE" Iain Banks

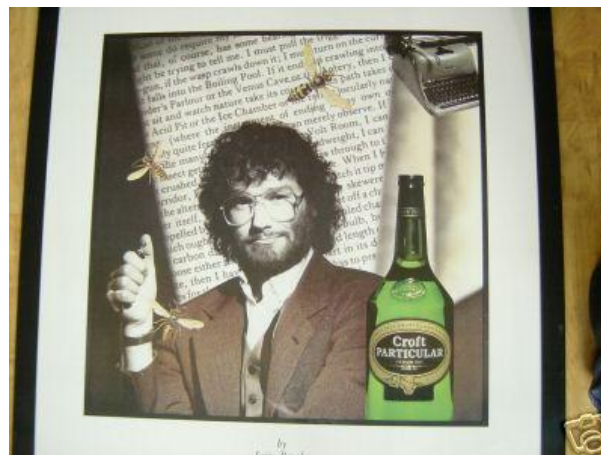
This fanzine deals with the author Iain (Menzie) Banks not the Civil Engineer Iain (Kevin) Banks originally of Stonehaven in Aberdeenshire, but currently residing in New Zealand.

Before he moved to the other side of the world a couple of years ago some people did stop and check he wasn't the author when they heard his name, particularly when he was in supermarkets in Edinburgh. This Iain has never met the author or indeed any other Iain Banks. Bespectacled, this Banks is clean-shaven, except when attempting to grow a moustache for the annual 'Movember' charity event. See: <http://www.movember.com.au/>

The only Banks book he has read is *Raw Spirit* which he enjoyed, and which made him a little homesick despite a return visit to get married last year.

## eBay Watch

Amongst the usually tatty paperbacks and sometimes tattier first editions every once in a while on eBay you find a Banks oddity. One such item that was recently offered was this framed advert featuring a youthful Banks advertising Sherry, actually a Palm Cream Sherry called Croft Particular. Apparently it appeared in the back of various Sunday newspaper colour supplements.



Iain was asked about this in an interview published in the magazine **Radical Scotland** (#42, December 1989 / January 1990). He replied that he had in fact purchased a bottle for his parents one Christmas a few years before doing the advert, and went onto say: "I once modelled clothes for the Italian issue of **Vogue**. It's interesting to do these things, to see how they're done. I'll do anything once. To me it's all experience."

The picture is, I understand, a self portrait hence the tagline "A Shot of Sherry by Iain Banks", and was part of a series of authors taking their own photographs. This item failed to meet the reserve price. Croft Particular is still available, although in a re-designed bottle to the one used when the picture above was taken.

Meanwhile to keep you up to date with prices that some of the decent first editions have realised on Ebay. A signed first of *The Wasp Factory* went for £108.98, whilst a similar *Walking on Glass* £36.00. Unsigned firsts of *The Player of Games*, *Espedair Street* and *Canal Dreams* sold for £32.09, £31.01 and £28.00 respectively.

## Iain (M) Banks A One-Day Conference

A one-day conference about Iain Banks hosted at University of Westminster, London, England on September 2nd 2006. It is being organised by the UK Network for Modern Fiction Studies in partnership with the University of Hull, and they are inviting proposals for papers and panels. The conference blurb continues:

This is the first UK conference to focus solely on Iain Banks and coincides with the publication of his latest novel.

Iain (M.) Banks is unquestionably an original, innovative writer whose work is marginalised and remains on the periphery of academic acceptance, failing to gain recognition from the contemporary canon. His often experimental, avant-garde and cross-genre narratives are concerned principally, but not exclusively, with the contestation of identity, sexuality, and selfhood. Gavin Millar's successful and acclaimed adaptations of *The Crow Road* and *Complicity* have made his work known to a larger audience. As a high-profile writer who appears regularly on television, Banks has a dedicated fan base.

Possibly because of the difficulty attached to categorising Banks' writing, compounded by his decision to publish his science fiction writing under the name of Iain M. Banks, his work has been neglected. Under scrutiny these publishing distinctions seem to collapse as Banks' use of fantasy is pervasive across his work.

Proposals for comprised panels of three speakers are also welcome.

Send abstracts (no more than 250 words) for proposed 20 minute papers by 28th February 2006 to [martyn.colebrook@english.hull.ac.uk](mailto:martyn.colebrook@english.hull.ac.uk) or to [katharine.cox@hull.ac.uk](mailto:katharine.cox@hull.ac.uk)

Please mark the subject of your email "Iain Banks abstract". Alternatively, you can post your abstracts to Katharine Cox, University of Hull Scarborough Campus, Filey Road, Scarborough, North Yorkshire, England, YO11 3AZ.

[I plan to attend so hope to see you there. Ed]

## Nova Awards

**The Banksoniain** was placed 18<sup>th</sup> equal in the Best Fanzine category of the Nova Awards that were given out at the annual Novacon convention held over the weekend 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> November at the Quality Hotel in Walsall.

We got two points, which means that either two of the 42 voters put us as their third favourite, or one person considered us their second favourite fanzine of the year. It also seems to put us on a par with the award winning and long running **Ansible** (which we are not) such is the way of SF fandom when voting for awards. Anyway, thanks for voting for us whoever you are.

With impeccable timing this issue will be released a couple of weeks or so after the convention. Next year's Novacon (#36) will take place at the same venue

Novacon: <http://novacon.org>

Ansible: <http://news.ansible.co.uk/>

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## BSFA Poll

The British Science Fiction Association announced the creation of a Hall of Fame for British SF writers with the inaugural inductees being: Mary Shelly, HG Wells, George Orwell and Arthur C Clarke. There will be an annual poll to add another writer to their ranks. The first poll is also being used to find the Best SF Book, Film, TV Series and Newcomer as well.

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

The poll runs until sometime early in 2006 with the results being revealed at Eastercon 2006, which happens to be in Glasgow and is called Concussion. For more details of this event see:

<http://www.eastercon2006.org/>

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**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](mailto:banksoniain@yahoo.co.uk)

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