

The Banksoniain #10

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

August 2006

Editorial

Apologies for the lateness of this issue, unfortunately real life got in the way of writing and it basically missed its slot in my quarterly schedule. If you want issues to come out on a more regular basis then please contribute articles, or even just ideas for articles, or anything really. Contact details at the end of the last page. Please expect publication to be biannual from now on so look for issue #11 in February 2007.

The issue features *The Crow Road*, the book, the TV series, the radio reading and the audio book, and to help you make all the connections we have produced a family tree of the major characters. This is probably my favourite Banks book, and I found it difficult to write about possibly for that reason, but maybe as Prentice is a close contemporary of mine, and despite growing up in Essex and not on the west coast of Scotland, I identify more with him than any other Banks character, and was studying at the University of Edinburgh when I first read it. Where would Prentice be now he is nearing forty?

This issue also looks back at Eastercon, and has a report on Banks's appearance at the Edinburgh Book Festival, as well as a couple of Banks related events that are forthcoming, and the usual news reports.

Thanks this issue go to Peter Capaldi for the interview by email, as well as Lucia at his management company for arranging it. The Armchair Anarchist wrote the Eastercon article and the combination of Roger Peyton (photographer) and Numbers (camera owner) produced the picture. Coecri wrote the report of Banks's appearance at the Edinburgh International Book Festival which took place on August 16th. As ever this fanzine wouldn't be what it is without Iain (M.) Banks.

Banks's Next Books

The next Banks book has been put back to March 2007. It also seems to have undergone a name change and is now called *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, rather than *Matter* (which could have been a dull Physics textbook). It also seems to have had another working title, *Empire* (a History textbook?)

The book after next, an Iain M. Banks effort that is definitely Culture - the opening section of this book having been written before *Steep Approach* was started - has also been put back as a consequence of its predecessor's delay. Iain is taking the summer off, and probably the winter as well, and plans to start work on the *Untitled Culture Novel* in 2007 with publication currently scheduled for August 2008.

More details of the audio CD of the new book have emerged with it listed as being 368 minutes long, 48 minutes shorter than the 5CD version of *The Algebraist*, so probably on four disks.

Foreign Releases

The US paperback edition of *The Algebraist* was published on June 15, by Night Shade Books (ISBN: 1597800449). A US unabridged recording of this work has been released by Recorded Books, it is available on 21 CDs (ISBN: 1419353780) or 17 cassettes (ISBN: 1419353764).

Meanwhile the Germans will be getting their own language version, *Der Algebraist*, at the end of October courtesy of publisher Heyne Verlag. ISBN: 345352201X.

Le Sens du vent (Look to Windward) was recently published in paperback form in France, along with *La Plage de verre* (Against a Dark Background).

Media Scanner

Ross Anderson wrote an article about 'Whisky with food?' for **The Times** (21/03/06). Concluding with a tasting of various brands of Glenfiddich he quoted Iain as describing it as "brilliantly different and unimprovably stunning", before adding his own comment about this statement: "as usual, he's right."

The G2 section of **The Guardian** (27/04/06) looked at what it described as "famous author-musician hookups" in an article by Alexis Petridis. The Iain Banks – Chris Coco track, *Dreaming*, from the 2002 album *Next Wave* was included and described as "A noble effort by the co-presenter of Radio 1's *Blue Room* to reclaim chill-out music from the coffee table by getting the Scots author to read from his revenge fantasy novel *Canal Dreams* over slow-motion beats", but then describe Iain as seeming "diffident about the end result", quoting him as saying "I won't be queuing up outside record companies to do any more".

An intriguing analogy was made by Anna Burnside when reviewing Thomas Legendre's book, *The Burning*, in **The Sunday Times** (26/02/06). Describing it as "a hefty read, a campus novel with extra astrophysics, green polemics and knee-grazing sex", she continued: "If Iain Banks had swapped science fiction for hiking and sustainable development, he might have written something very similar."

Iain has given permission for the website ScotlanWhisky.com to publish an extract from *Raw Spirit* about Islay on their website, and they have augmented the text with some nice, and relevant, pictures.

See <http://www.scotlandwhisky.com/355124/355418>

The Contemporary British Novel, a new book edited by James Acheson and Sarah Ross was published in January. It concentrates on authors whose first novels were published after 1980, and so includes Iain (M.) Banks in the twenty-two novelists for which specially commissioned essays have been written. The book is divided into four parts, each focussing on a particular approach. Iain has been placed

into the Postmodernism section in a chapter called '*Player of Games: Iain (M.) Banks, Jean-François Lyotard and Sublime Terror*' by Cairns Craig.

ISBN: 0748618945 (Hbk) 0748618953 (Pbk)

Joel Rickett reported in **The Guardian** (23/06/06) that Orbit, Banks's SF publisher was setting up Orbit USA to break into the American market. It will be run by Tim Holman who moves from being editorial director at Orbit. Previously Mr Holman was Iain's editor so there could be a possibility of new Banks SF editions over there.

An online survey conducted by **The Book Magazine** named JK Rowling as Britain's greatest living writer with Iain Banks at #14. Alasdair Gray made equal 19th.

At the Edinburgh Book Festival (see pages #11-12) Iain mentioned his playing of the computer game *Civilisation*, and separately admitted that his new book had been delayed. The Pandora column in **The Independent** (18/12/06) put these snippets together and blamed the game for the hold-up.

Imagining Albion

Iain's contribution to the BBC Radio 4 programme mentioned in the last issue has been broadcast. It turned out to be a four part series from Francis Spufford called *Imagining Albion* which began on June 22nd with an episode subtitled 'Big Brother and the Brave New World' and which looked at Utopias. Wells and Huxley were discussed in the bulk of the programme before it jumped forward to recent works which covered Iain Banks.

An interesting take on Banks was expressed by Robert Hanks in his review of the first episode in **The Independent** (28/06/06). Hanks commented that "nearly all utopias turn out to be dystopias at second or third glance", and continued, "Iain M Banks got closer in discussing 'the Culture', a want-free society that features in several of his novels: despite the fact that they have everything, he said, the Culture's inhabitants are still unhappy, because they are human. He and Huxley were saying the same thing: to be human is to be unhappy; therefore, to be happy is to be inhuman."

Bridging Fantasies: The Fiction of Iain M. Banks

Iain Banks Conference

The UK Network for Modern Fiction are organising a conference on Iain (M) Banks at the University of Westminster for Saturday 2nd September 2006. There will be a small charge (in the region of £10) for administration and refreshments.

Tim Middleton who wrote the introduction article for the special edition of **Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction** (#76, Summer 1999) about Iain M Banks will be giving the introductory keynote plenary lecture which will focus on Iain's use of Scottish landscape and history. This should have particular emphasis on *The Crow Road*, and its alternative geography of the Argyll area. The closing plenary is from Andrew Butler who wrote the article *The Strange Case of Mr Banks: Doubles and The Wasp Factory* in the edition of **Foundation** mentioned above. Both these articles are briefly discussed in **Banksoniain** #3.

The two other sessions in the day long programme give participants the option to attend one of three concurrently running panels that have two or three papers each to discuss. These papers focus on topics from war and terror, to gothic and gender issues, as well as space and time, and are being presented by academics from around the world.

If you wish to attend then contact Katharine.Cox @ hull.ac.uk
Or Martyn.Colebrook @ english.hull.ac.uk

Banksoniain #11 should have a report.

Noir Twinning

One thing Iain will not be doing is the, **Noir Twinning**, event in Marseille, despite what is say on the British Council website:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-literature-projects-in-prospect.htm>

Iain recently reiterated that he will not be re-applying for his passport until Blair is no longer Prime Minister.

Alt-Fiction 2007

Alt-Fiction is a one-day celebration of science-fiction, fantasy and horror writing. Iain Banks has agreed to appear at next year's event in the Darwin Suite of the Assembly Rooms in Derby on April 28th. You can keep up to date with news about the event at the weekly blog run by the organiser Alex Davis at: <http://altfiction2007.blogspot.com/>

The 2006 event was the first Alt-Fiction to take place, occurring on May 6th, running from 12:30 to 20:30, and having the stated aim of giving fans and aspiring writers of the genres a chance to meet published authors and to find out more about being published. Last year's programme had three concurrent streams: firstly, a Q&A stream of 45 minute sessions with authors; secondly, more intimate and interactive author readings and discussions; and finally a workshop stream. Guests and panellists included authors as well as publishers, editors and agents.

The organiser, Alex Davis, has a blog at: <http://altfiction2007.blogspot.com/>

Radio Cafe

The recording that was made at the Edinburgh International Book Festival event hosted by Janice Forstye should be broadcast on BBC Radio Scotland in the autumn.

Radio Cafe is a forty-five minute week day arts show at 13:15. It has its own website at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/radioscotland/view/show.shtml?radiocafe>

Rocket Science

Iain was back reviewing albums on Marc Riley's last ever Rocket Science show on BBC 6Music (26/08/06). They talked about the book Iain has just finished, and then he reviewed: Victorian English Gentleman's Club - Impossible Sightings Over Shelton; Get Cape, Wear Cape, Fly - An Oaktree; and Bat For Lashes - Trophy. He and Marc apparently later went to see Man City play Arsenal, as for once Iain was in the studio and not on the line from Edinburgh.

Contact!

The Interesting Pints Gang Meet The Man Himself; A Tale of Books, Beer and Banks

On Easter weekend in the year 2006, a small clade of individuals came together at Eastercon, that being a gathering of UK science fiction fans, which that year was held in Glasgow. All the attendees were hopeful of meeting (or at least seeing) their authorial idols, but this select group had a more specific target in mind. The clade in question were a roguish collection of Iain Banks fan-forum members, and their objective was nothing less than hopefully gaining an audience with that very man. Fate was to smile upon their endeavours.

One among this motley crew of misfits was the esteemed editor of I(M)B fanzine **The Banksoniain**. Through his work on this periodical, he was in occasional contact with The Man Himself; when he heard that TMH was to be in attendance at Eastercon, and that the disparate adventurers who would soon become known as ‘The Interesting Pints Gang’ would be there also, he sent a letter that said, in effect; ‘Mr. Banks, a bunch of your most obsessive fans would relish a few moments of your company; if you dare, meet them by the real ale bar at 7pm on Friday night.’

During the day preceding the allotted meeting time, the members of the Gang gradually gravitated to each other. The Armchair Anarchist and Coerceri had arrived as a duo; the Anarchist had travelled far, from the distant southern shores of the Kingdom, and was encamped at Coerceri’s more local demesne for the duration of the convention. DaveH had arrived with the ZZ9 Plural Z Alpha collective, a ruthless band of Douglas Adams obsessives. The man they call Conscious Bob had materialised from a comparatively local region of Scotland, whilst the mighty Numbers had taken the train from the industrial Northlands of England. As they met, a new alliance was forged. Tales were swapped, ales were purchased, hopes were held. The moment of truth drew near.

At zero hour, the Gang seized a table in the hotel lobby where the bar was located. They

secured fortifying beverages for themselves, and settled down to author-spotting and tale-swapping. Almost apropos of nothing, The Man Himself settled at the table with them. Awe was ubiquitous.

The one known as Iain brought with him no pretence or arrogance; he greeted the group, and was soon engaged in animated conversation on diverse subjects, from school uniforms to Scotch. Revelations and bon mots were the order of the evening; it emerged that in addition to having “twelve points on his artistic licence”, IMB has three points on the real one. Local man Coerceri called him out over a scene in *Complicity*, wherein the protagonist looks down from a viewpoint onto the town of Greenock, and sees the grid-like pattern of its streets – indeed, it transpires that this is an untruth borne of necessity; the streets of Greenock cannot in fact be seen from that point! It was also disclosed that the lit-up town of Helensburgh, spotted a-glow beside the Clyde at night from a distance during booze-soaked walks home, was the inspiration for the megaships of Vavatch Orbital, as featured in *Consider Phlebas*.

IMB demonstrated himself to be a charming, entertaining and erudite gentleman – and a man of the people. He took it upon himself to secure a round of refreshments for the assembled gathering, scribbling the order list on the back of a flyer which will become an icon of fandom in years to come. During this audience with greatness, the Gang were also witness to The Man chatting with other friends and fellow authors; there were visits from Ken Macleod, Charlie Stross and even the dread Cthulhu, all of which added to the convivially surreal atmosphere of the evening.

After an hour or so of interaction, The Man Himself bade his farewells and departed to spend time with people more familiar and less wide-eyed, leaving an awestruck Gang to chew over the incredible event they had just been part of. More beverages were fetched and consumed; the infamous order list was fought over; photographs were compared and evaluated. As the night wound down to a close, the hotel foyer became the site of a huge all-comers paper airplane battle, in

which the Gang were keen participants, being still full of high spirits. Eventually the inevitable was accepted, and the Gang separated to make their way to their places of rest, safe in the knowledge that they had been part of an informal gathering that other IMB fans could only dream of. It may be that in times to come the Gang will convene again, maybe with more members, maybe with less, and maybe never to experience such close contact with The Man Himself ever again. But whatever should happen, they know in their hearts that they will always have Glasgow.

This article is dedicated to:

- Iain M. Banks, for reasons most obvious;
- The Interesting Pints Gang, for good times shared;
- and especially Coerceri, for giving shelter to a Sassenach far from home.

Editor's Note: Names may have been changed to protect the guilty.

About the author:

The Armchair Anarchist is a dishevelled library assistant who (mercifully) does not always write in such a ridiculous idiom.

In addition to his gainful employment in the fabled **Velcro City** he is a book reviewer for British science fiction **Interzone**

<http://www.ttapress.com/IZ.html>,

A music journalist for **The Fly Wessex**
<http://flywessex.blogspot.com/>,

A blogger cum column writer for **Futurismic**:
<http://www.futurismic.com/index.html>;

His write up of the entire Eastercon can be found here:

http://www.futurismic.com/2006/05/post_9.html

He also maintains his own website, **Velcro City Tourist Board**, which is replete with material that any science fiction reader should find intriguing, at the very least. He would be overjoyed were you to visit there and leave a comment or two.

<http://www.velcro-city.co.uk/>

The gang and TMH; Conscious Bob maintains his anonymity.



Picture by Roger Peyton using Numbers camera.

The Crow Road

April 1992 saw the publication of the Banks version of a family saga. It saw the light of day under the Scribners imprint of Macmillan, the only Banks book to do so, and has the famous opening line; "It was the day my grandmother exploded".

The book took longer than usual for Banks to write as it turned out to be longer than originally planned. Iain further departed from his winter writing schedule when he was delayed by an eye infection after his New Year break, and also watching the Gulf War on TV, a contemporary event which makes its way into the book.

The reaction of reviewers was on the whole approving with some notable dissent. In **The Sunday Times** (19/04/92), Paul Golding described the book as "shrill family schlock-saga, a homage to tits, tankards and tartan", although his counterpart in the daily version, Steven Daly (30/04/92), called it a "Technicolor extravaganza", although admitting "Iain Banks is too strong a taste to be acquired". In the **Times Literary Supplement**, Natasha Walter commented, "He marries pacy plot-lines with languorous diction and he mixes a wealth of straight social realism with flights of gothic fantasy." On the other hand Nicholas Lezard thought that the book "settles the question of whether Banks can write. He can't." **Scotland on Sunday** called Banks the "enfant explosif"

Of those who have criticised the book the most common complaint is the gimmickry of so frequently switching back and forth in time, and having flashbacks within flashbacks. Conversely this is one of the stylistic features that those that acclaim the work also point out, with Cairns Craig in his work on *Complicity*¹ noting in a section subtitled 'Subverting Genres' that prolepsis and analepsis are "crucial to his serious fiction". Another articulation of this complaint is the dismissing of the author as writing for the TV generation. Banks happily accepts this pointing out he is a member of

that group and what is the problem with writing for them anyway.

Banks also readily admits that it is not the most structurally coherent of his works; "I wanted to write something big and a bit untidy, a bit scruffy in itself, I suppose," he says. "It's meant to have that feel of reality which just is untidy. It's not a thing that can be nicely tidied up." **The Observer** (07/07/96).

Banks's take on the family saga is essentially a tale of three families which are interlinked through marriage which have crossed the class divide. The main focus is on the middle class McHoans, who have traditionally provided management at the Gallanach glassworks. The factory itself is owned by the Urvills who also have an estate and castle, whilst the working class Watts inhabit the council estate. A family tree is supplied on page #7 in order to follow the relationships.

Alan MacGillivray's *Scotnotes*² book is a study guide to *The Wasp Factory* and *Whit* as well as *The Crow Road*, and it discusses in depth the structure and story of the novel along with some of its themes. One of the major topics that MacGillivray picks out is the quest for the truth. The blurb on the back of the proof edition established this describing Prentice as "full of questions" and then listing fifteen of them culminating in the major one that of Rory's fate. The murder mystery aspect of the storyline was actually one of the last plot elements to fall into place when Banks was planning the book.

The sixteen months that Prentice's story covers goes from his grandmother's funeral to his nephew's naming via his father's death and the discovery of his uncle's body and the possible unmasking of his murderer. The novel is therefore taken as a rite of passage story, but although focussed on Prentice is more than just his story. Another great quest in the book is the one for religious truth. Prentice's father is an atheist who has brought his children up to question everything and make their own decisions. He is therefore extremely disappointed when his son, perhaps

¹ *Iain Banks's Complicity*, ISBN: 0826452477

² ISBN: 0948877480

in a fit of childhood rebellion, tells him that he believes in some form of higher power. Kenneth is even further let down when rather than being his apprentice, his son becomes embroiled in the bizarre religion invented by his brother, and becomes his acolyte.

A number of readers have reported consulting a map of Scotland whilst reading the book in order to get a better sense of the landscape that Prentice inhabits. This can leave them more confused as Iain was playing fast and loose with the geography. He explained this on the first page of chapter four in his non-fiction book *Raw Spirit*. "I'd decided I wanted to locate the fictional town of Gallanach near Crinan, on the mainland. I needed the place to have a deep-water port with easy access to the Atlantic and I didn't want to edit out the Corryvreckan so I blithely cut Jura in two. You get to so this sort of thing when you're a writer." As revealed on page #4 Banks recently admitted he had twelve points on his poetic licence! He so confused David Howe in an interview³ by describing it as a mythical part of Argyll, that the interviewer thought the book was called *The Cruel Road*.

The Crow Road has been translated into a number of languages including German, Russian, Dutch and Finnish. Translating it into French was the subject of a doctoral thesis entitled: 'Problems of translating modern Scottish literature into French, with special reference to *The Crow Road* by Iain Banks'. It was submitted to Iain's old university, Stirling, by Olivier Cazeilles in 2004. The work is written in French, but an English abstract describes the work as using Banks's novel to "provide thorough social and cultural contextualisation before considering ways of translating the novel".

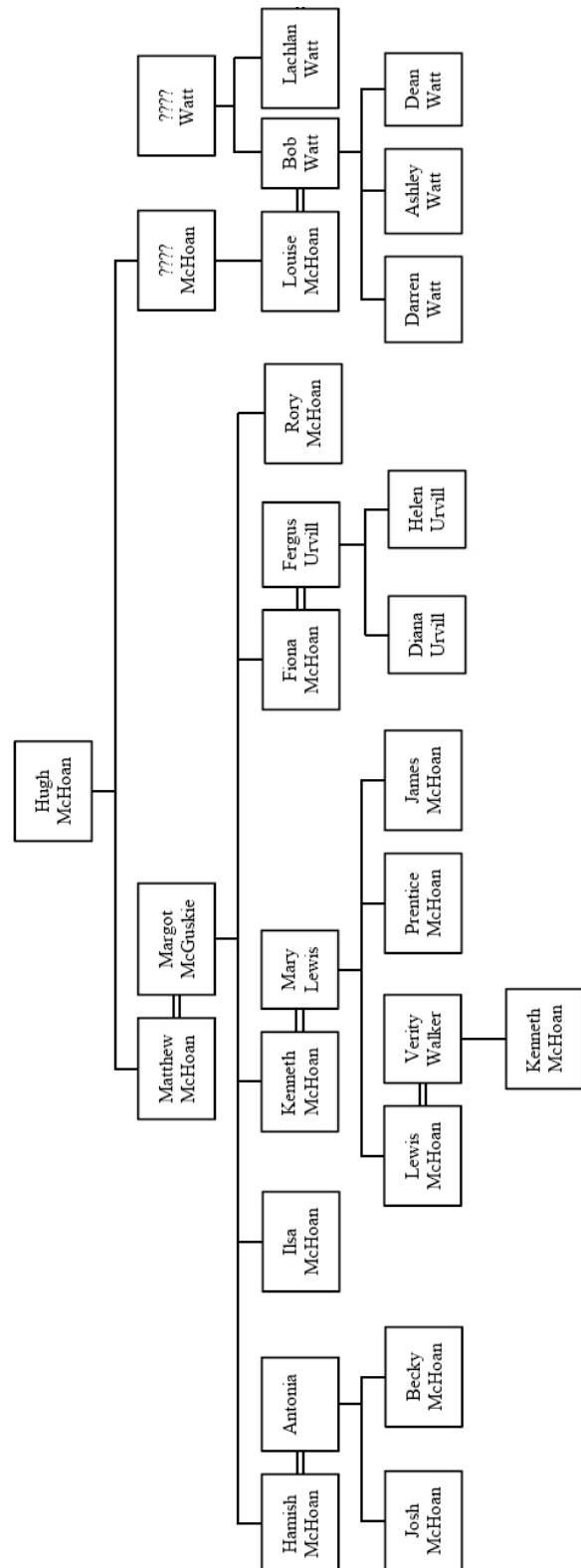
For the last word we return to Banks who agreed with Andrew Wilson⁴ in a 1994 interview that *The Crow Road* and his next book, *Against a Dark Background*, together form the end of a cycle in his work, and that part of his own reaction to the cosiness of *The Crow Road*, by writing *Complicity*, which is one of the "nasty" ones.

³ Starburst #151, p #13

⁴ <http://textualities.net/writers/features-a-g/banksi01.php>

Crow Road - Family Tree

Most characters in the book come from three related families; the McHoans, the Urvills and the Watts. It should also be noted that Verity Walker is a cousin of the Urvill twins, her mother being the sister of Fergus.



Crow Road – Video

The television series was shot in the first half of 1996 in the real world location of the west of Scotland which stood in for Iain's slightly alternative geography of the same area. It was shown on BBC2 on the four Mondays of November that year, up against *Panorama*, along with, as some reviewers noted with glee, *Billy Connolly's World Tour of Australia* on BBC1, and a crime thriller series starring Clive Owen called *Sharman*, on ITV. There was so much to fit into the final instalment that it ran for 65 minutes, pushing *Newsnight* back from its usual timeslot.

It received both immediate and lasting critical acclaim. Lynn Truss in *The Times* (5/11/96) said "Happily, Monday nights for the next four weeks are saved from misery by *The Crow Road* (BBC2), a quite breathtakingly subtle and engaging adaptation of Iain Banks's novel. Directed by Gavin Millar and adapted by Bryan Elsley, this is such high-class, delicately witty stuff that watching it I nearly burst into tears of gratitude. (I had just watched *Sharman*.)"

Mark Duguid's *Screenonline* article about the production observed that "Bryan Elsley's adaptation is truer to the essence of Banks' novel than to its detail, adding as well as discarding scenes and confidently rearranging Banks' chaotic chronology"⁵ There are according to the director, sixteen timeshifts in the first episode alone⁶. Duguid continues, "most significantly, Elsley introduces a series of conversations between Prentice and the missing Rory, a device that proves surprisingly effective as a representation of the young man's nagging quest." The writer admits that this device took much "to-ing and fro-ing"² with the director and producer before it was finally used. The screenplay won Elsley the Writers' Guild of Great Britain Award for TV Dramatised Serial.

The series won three Scottish BAFTAs at the awards ceremony in Glasgow at the end of 1997. Bill Paterson took the Best TV Actor award (beating his screen son Joe McFadden),

⁵ <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1059375/>

⁶ DVD Commentary

and Bryan Elsley scooped the one for Best Writer, and the show itself took the Best Drama Series prize. Paterson in an interview from just last year (*The Sunday Times* 18/12/05) seemed to be annoyed that there was a country qualification to the award and that it had not got the national recognition it deserved. It received four nominations in the (UK) BAFTAs, including Best Drama Serial, but won none, losing the main category to *Our Friends In The North*.

The makers tried to get hold of Iain during both the adaptation and shooting of the production, but he steadfastly refused to have any involvement. After Iain had seen all four episodes he sent a letter thanking them for looking after "his baby". The fact that Iain considered himself a novelist and likes to leave adaptations to others is discussed in the DVD commentary and despite admitting they were looking for his input at the time, the makers approve of Iain's standpoint².

Despite the ratings and critical success the series was only released on video by the BBC (BBCV6565) in February 1999, over two years after the . In this version it was edited into a film like format lasting just under three and three-quarter hours. It then took another five years to make it to DVD in October 2004 with an independent release from a company called Second Sight. They restored the episodic structure to make the release the full broadcast length of just over four hours.

The DVD packaging displays a quote frequently attributed to Iain about the television adaptation: "Annoyingly better than the book in far too many places"⁷. On the actual disks there are a couple of extras. The first is a commentary on episode one by the producer (Bradley Adams) director (Gavin Millar) and screenwriter (Bryan Elsley). It this they reveal a variety of inside information about the production such as how to get Godrun Ure up a tree, but also why they

⁷ In an effort to be comprehensive and finally document the source of this quote for this I asked Mr Banks about it, and received the reply: "The Crow Road quote sounds like me – no idea when and where I said it though – sorry."

changed the things that they did, and what else they considered changing.

The second extra is a twenty-five minute interview with Iain Banks conducted by John Brown originally from an edition of the Scottish Television show *Arts and Parts* that originally went out in June 1997. The point of the series was to bring together two people with complementary experience for them to discuss their work in the arts. Mr Brown is a scriptwriter, but the interview discusses more than just the adaptation of the novel.

The budget of *The Crow Road* was reportedly around £2.7 million, and an unexpected consequence of the making of the programme, according to an article by Giles Foden in **The Guardian** (05/05/06), was that a planned adaptation of *What a Carve Up*, the Jonathan Coe novel did not happen. The article stated that “about 600 pages of scripts were written - but the BBC2 drama budget was tight in 1996 and they only had room to do one big serial”.

A TV tie-in of the paperback edition of the book with a wraparound cover with various pictures from the production, including a large shot of Prentice on the cover was issued, and Joe McFadden who played the main role did a signing session just before Christmas 1996 at a bookshop in Ayr.

Crow Road - Audio

The Crow Road has been broadcast on BBC radio, and also released as an unabridged audiobook.

Kenneth Glenaan read an adaptation produced by Pam Wardell and broadcast by BBC Radio Scotland over the Christmas/New Year period 1995/1996 in their Storyline strand. The ten 15 minute episodes were repeated on BBC7 25th August – 5th September 2003. The adaptation was by Win Hunter, and his 187 page script can be found in the Scottish Theatre Archive which is a special collection in the library of the University of Glasgow.

The Crow Road is read in its unabridged entirety by Ewan Stewart for Chivers Audio Books. This version was first released in July 1998 and has the ISBN 0754000249.

Peter Capaldi talks Banks

Mr Capaldi intersects the works of Iain Banks having played Uncle Rory in the BBC's adaptation of *The Crow Road*, and then gone on to read a number of non M novels as audiobooks.

How did you get the part of Uncle Rory in the Crow Road?

I was asked to go along and meet the director Gavin Millar which I did and then they offered me the part.

Had you read the book, or any Iain Banks book, before becoming involved in The Crow Road?

I can't remember if I had read the book before then or not. I had read *The Wasp Factory* and thought it was fantastic. It's mixture of intelligent horror, vivid imagination and mundane Scottish detail made it powerful and new. I loved it. So much so that I began to try and find out what the film rights situation was with it. I didn't get very far until one day I was passing Virgin Record in Oxford Street and saw that Iain Banks himself was signing copies of his books. My curiosity got the better of me and I thought I'd go and have a fly look at the man behind *The Wasp Factory*. As chance would have it someone from his publishers recognised me as my face was on the cover of another of their author's books (*Mr. Wakefield's Crusade* by Bernice Rubens. I had played Mr. Wakefield in the TV adaptation of the book) and they introduced me to Iain. This quite a thrill and I found him delightful. I was a bit intimidated (I usually am by authors) because he was so clever etc but I found him charming.

As Uncle Rory you appear in flashbacks or as a ghost/figment of imagination. Did either of these factors affect how you acted the part?

I loved playing Uncle Rory. It is one of my all time favourite roles. I'm not usually like this about parts but I just felt I knew him. I'd seen guys like him knocking around Byres Road (long established arty/bourgeois enclave of Glasgow's west end). He was decent, arty, a laugh and sensitive. I remember Kare Carin the costume designer brought in a pile of gear for me to try on and among it all was a soft

much laundered floral shirt that was just perfect. And that kind of helped me a lot. That and the hair (extensions).

I loved the book and the TV adaptation because although it featured a murder it was really about families. And I thought Iain wrote brilliantly about family and hoped he'd do more.

Being the ghost/figment affected the part in as much as we know he carried the mystery with him so it made the audience interested in him without me really doing much. It gave him a lot of sympathy. He was dead for a start. And also he was helping Prentice, who he had liked as a child and was now going through a difficult time. So his ghostly appearances were also caring and avuncular in some way. Though the book is different in that respect (no ghost) it remains the same Rory to me.

Is there any other character in *The Crow Road* that you would have liked to have played?

God any of them. Prentice but I was too old. And his Dad (Bill Paterson) but I was too young! (Not now). Lots of brilliant parts.

Is there any particular character in any Banks book you would like to play?

I was lucky to play Rory. Couldn't ask for more than that.

You have narrated audio book abridgments of Iain's work. Did you get offered these because of your association with Banks via the TV series? Were there plans to do any of the other Iain Banks books at the time?

I can't remember exactly how the books happened. I may have done *The Wasp Factory* long ago before any of the others and was not really lined up to do any more but post *Crow Road*, I think (though I don't know this for sure) that Joe McFadden [Prentice to Capaldi's Rory] was going to do the *Crow Road* and couldn't for some reason or another so I was drafted in and thereafter did a bunch though I don't do them now.

Which one of these was your favourite at the time you made the recordings?

The Wasp Factory I think but to be honest I didn't really enjoy the recordings, not because they were Iain Banks books but because it's

like hard labour and I hadn't figured out the best approach. Though I have got more experienced now and quite enjoy it.

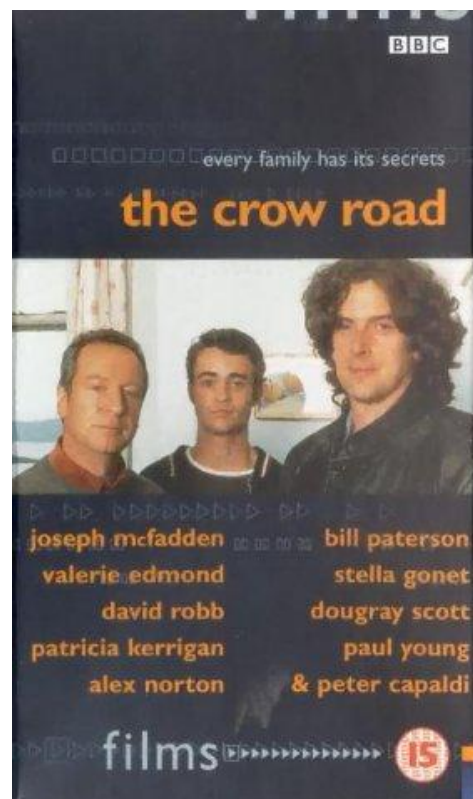
These abridgements last about three hours, how long does it take you to record them?

I think about 2 days each. And that's head down no messing about. As I say, hard labour.

Which Banks book would you like to see on the large or small screen?

I still think *The Wasp Factory* could make a brilliant film as long as its scale and period was respected.

Thanks to Peter for taking time out from shooting an episode of *Waking the Dead* in early May to answer these questions. In August he starts work on a new series of the award winning political comedy *The Thick Of It* for which he received a BAFTA nomination but lost out to his co-star Chris Langham. He is also working to secure funding for a film he said he was "doing", when he means writing and directing, called *The Jacobite Slipper*. It should star Ewan McGregor, and has also been known as *The Great Pretender*.



Capaldi (with hair extensions) and friends

Banksie at Edinburgh Bookfest

Report by Coercri

Edinburgh was glorious on a cracking summer's day and her streets were crammed with locals, visitors (both national and international) watching the various free shows by acts performing at the Fringe and the main fest. The vibe on Princes Street and the Gardens was a frenetic psychedelic assault on the senses tempting one to dally there and not press on through to the Bookfest, sited just off the west end of the street.

Charlotte Square Gardens! A beautiful place anytime, but today just lazing around, it is a haven of cool and tranquillity. The square sheltered itself and its visitors from the constant drone of traffic and ever changing and ever competing blasts of Euro-Trance backing didgeridoo, bagpipes, indigenous and foreign orchestras, pipes, whistles and electric guitars: 15 marquees surrounding old Prince Albert's cavalry pose and some much needed cool shade.

Banksie was due to speak at a daily Amnesty International event titled Imprisoned Writers along with other as yet unidentified speakers but the day's programme showed that Robert Fisk was scheduled to speak at the same time: dilemma. Dilemma solved easily by Fisk's late withdrawal.

Amnesty International Imprisoned Writers Event: Iranian Blogs

The event was organised and introduced by Rosemary Burnett; Amnesty's chair for this series of talks. She presented Philip Cole, philosophy lecturer from Middlesex University; Caroline Moorehead, novelist, biographer and human rights commentator; Catherine Merrydale, professor of history from QM College and Iain Banks, novelist - exalted company for TMH indeed. (Banksie looked serious and sombre in demeanour as befitted the occasion, albeit wearing a cream, lightweight summer jacket suited to the weather.) Ever the genial and sociable fellow, Banksie sorted out the panel's refreshments whilst introductions were made.

The chair offered some background to the current socio-political situation in Iran: 70% of Iran's population is aged under 30 and appear to adhere to a general popular movement for reform there (involving freedom of speech, democratisation and feminism) which is being overshadowed and undermined by political pressure from the West in general and economic sanctions by the USA. Blogging has taken off in a big way in Iran, to the extent that 80% of all blogs in Farsi originate in Iran and that graffiti on toilet walls (the main former method of dissent expression) has virtually ceased.

Blogging and e-mailing are not without their risks to these people though and many have been imprisoned and tortured as a consequence of their expressions on the net.

The speakers read a variety of extracts from Iranian blogs to both illustrate these points and to demonstrate the breadth and depth of feeling of young people in touch with the modern world but subject to repression and silencing to maintain the status quo.

Banksie (as the last of the speakers) focused on one blog only to highlight the difficulties of a populist emergent push for democratisation. Given his writings, his love of the craft and his well publicised political actions, it was easy to tell not only that free speech is near and dear to his heart, but also that he empathised strongly with these young people struggling to drag themselves and their country into the 21st century. He told us how as part of the USA's economic sanctions against Iran that US based ISPs and blog providers have withdrawn their services from Iran (GoDaddy.com was named.). It was also pointed out that Yahoo has provided subscriber details to government authorities (on request from them) resulting in imprisonment, solitary confinement and torture of a range of bloggers and journalists. We were asked to respond accordingly: draw your own conclusions.

The event lasted a half hour and ended without questions but leaving the audience with much to consider.

**The Pinsent Masons Event:
Iain Banks reads from his new novel.**

This event was scheduled for 8pm; the evening remained sultry, even in the haven of Charlotte Square. The setting, like for all other events at this Bookfest, was a marquee - a big one - and was filled to its 500 capacity on a steeply banked tier of seating, with all the best seats "reserved for sponsor." I counted at least 40 such seats, which seemed a bit excessive and unfair to me, especially as I was relegated to a precarious perch in the third from top row.

The lights dimmed precisely on time and Iain was escorted on stage by Janice Forsyth, the BBC Radio Scotland presenter, who advised us that the 'show' was being recorded for broadcast in the Autumn as part of the station's *Radio Cafe* presentations on Scottish arts. (Iain guested on Janice's Saturday morning show as part of his PR campaign for *The Algebraist*). She clearly admires Iain and his work and gave a very ebullient introduction to his reading from the new book.

This was a very different Iain from the Amnesty reading earlier in the day: smiling, joking and bouncy like Tigger. Presenting at the mic however, he came over very apologetic and even sheepish, explaining that never before had he read from a work that was not yet ready for or in publication. The novel is now called *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, and may have "some more work undertaken on it, other than the usual tidying up." Iain explained that he may yet write another section which would better explain the story and the title, but may not, as it is not really required. Expected date of publication is now March 2007. Hmm...

Iain sketched in background details to the story and the section from which he was going to read: the outline remains as previously reported on the official website. He stood on stage with a sheath of several stapled loose leaf pages which he produced, folded-up, from his jacket pocket (hmm...) and began reading.

It began in 'typical' Iain Banks style (if there is such a thing); a big Merc speeding

southwards on the M9 in Scotland with two cousins from the book's family in conversation; Alban (the main character) and Fielding (a wild boy). They recall a drug induced episode which they had previously enjoyed in Singapore, with many weird and hilarious incidents. At one point Iain interrupted his reading to offer an explanation, reconsidered, advising the audience, "You'll just have to make it up, after all, I had to also!" This interruption was swiftly followed by another, as Iain apologised to Janice, "I guess the BBC are going to have a lot of bleeps in here?" Janice just laughed. In the best Banksie tradition oaths, curses, epithets and swear words abounded.

The section he read reminded me of the sense of *The Crow Road*, confirming to some extent the rumours extant around his changes to this novel from that which we were originally led to believe. It was very funny however, and I still look forward to its publication in March...hmm...

When Iain sat down, Janice Forsyth led off the questions. Iain answered and performed in his usual garrulous and extrovert manner, dropping in here and there little insights into his techniques and life. Janice then handed questions over to the audience, courtesy of roving mics, and Iain dealt sensitively with all of these points. Unfortunately, none of the allowed questions were about the new book, and were confined to the first few rows of the audience. The lights dimmed exactly at 9pm. Iain carefully folded up his manuscript excerpt to secrete back into his jacket inside pocket, and strolled of to a crowded book signing in the adjacent marquee.

About the author:

Coercri has his pint raised on the picture on page #5. He spends far too much time in on the Iain Banks Forum website.

<http://213.253.134.7/banks/forum2/default.asp>

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