

# The Banksoniain #11

## An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

February 2007

### Editorial

This issue focuses on the new Iain Banks novel, *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, as well as looking back at *Against A Dark Background*. A whole slew of appearances are reported on in Media Scanner, we have many forthcoming personal and media appearances to list, hence the short editorial.

Thanks for this issue go to Peter Kenny for the interview, the gang at the Iain Banks Forum for their encouragement, and, as always, Iain Banks himself.

Look out for **The Banksoniain** #12 in August, hopefully in time for Mecon 10.

### Broadcast Banks

**The Culture Show:** Peter Capaldi (interviewed in the last **The Banksoniain**) will be interviewing Iain for a segment of programme six in the current run on BBC2 at 18:55 on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> February (repeated at 00:05, so Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> really).

**The Book Show:** The Artsworld literature show hosted by Mariella Frostrup features Iain Banks on show #15. This will be first broadcast at 19:00 on March 1<sup>st</sup>, and then repeated over the following week, including an outing on Sky Three at 16:00 on March 4<sup>th</sup>.

**World Book Club:** Iain will be recording a radio programme for the BBC World Service at the beginning of March. He will be talking about *The Wasp Factory* to Harriett Gilbert in front of an audience who have all provided questions. Questions can also be sent via email to [worldbookclub@bbc.co.uk](mailto:worldbookclub@bbc.co.uk). The programme should be broadcast on the World Service at the end of March, and will also be available for streaming from the website: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/programmes/world\\_book\\_club.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/programmes/world_book_club.shtml)

### Banks's Next Book

If we take *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* as his current book, the next one is an 'M' and definitely a Culture book. He is writing it at the moment and plans to have the first draft finished by the end of April, publicity for *Garbadale* permitting.

Titles under consideration for the next book include; *The Integrity of Objects*, *The Expeditionary*, or even *Matter* (just to confuse everyone as that was a possible title for *Garbadale*). The second of those titles would seem to indicate that we are out on the fringes of the Culture again where the interesting things happen. The book, whatever it ends up being called, is tentatively listed for publication by Orbit in February 2008. By then, of course, we should have a new Prime Minister at Westminster and so the next publicity tour may well include the first overseas trips for a while.

### Banks Live

Tickets for **alt.fiction**, the one day science fiction writing event at Assembly Rooms in Derby on Saturday 28th April, are now available from <http://www.assemblyrooms-derby.co.uk>. The event begins at 12:00 and runs until 21:00 with many writers, as well as publishers and agents, taking part in readings, workshops, discussions and book launches. Guests include: Iain Banks, Harry Harrison, Graham Joyce and Ramsey Campbell.

**Mecon 10** (aka **Mecon X**), the Northern Irish Science Fiction convention, runs from Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> to Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August in Belfast and has Iain Banks as its guest of honour, with Paul Cornell, Ian McDonald, Leah Moore, Alistair Reynolds, John Reppion and Michael Scott Rohan as other guests.

See <http://www.mecon.org.uk/>

## Media Scanner

*The Steep Approach to Garbadale* has its own publicity article later in the issue so there are no spoilers for the book in this section.

The **Night Shade Books** newsletter reports that they have had to do a second printing of *The Algebraist*, “since the first ten thousand copies sold out quite a bit quicker than we’d imagined”.

July 2006 saw the publication by Tor of an anthology entitled: *The Space Opera Renaissance* (ISBN: 0765306174), edited by David G. Hartwell, Kathryn Cramer. The book covers eight decades through 32 stories, over 941 pages, arranged chronologically and thematically, including *A Gift from the Culture* by Iain M. Banks in Section III: ‘Transitions/Redefiners (late 1970s to late 1980s)’.

Peter Millar’s “top six satires on despotism” was a recent ‘Critic’s Chart’ in **The Times** (26/08/06) included *Consider Phlebas*, and described it as: “Iain M. Banks Galactic war between materialist culture and fanatically religious three legged Idirans –a poignant take on the ‘clash of cultures’.”

The Digital TV Pick Of The Day in **The Observer** (03/09/06) by Sarah Hughes was the More4 documentary *Gunner’s Palace*, about the American 2/3 Field Artillery unit that moved into a Palace in Iraq formerly occupied by Uday Hussain. Her description included the following: “At times – notably the scenes of the weary soldiers hanging around Uday’s endless empty rooms – this film is more reminiscent of a novel than reality (Iain M Banks’ *Use of Weapons* springs to mind) but that simply adds to the compelling nature of what we see.”

Luiza Sauma’s profile of Jeremy Warmley in **The Independent on Sunday** (03/09/06) had him citing his inspiration as “the mix-tapes given to him by an older friend, as well as Iain Banks’s *Espedair Street*, a novel about an infamous rockstar.”

**The Observer** reported on a “best book of the last twenty-five years” survey that had *Disgrace* by JM Coetzee at #1, and *Money* by

Martin Amis at #2, but included *The Wasp Factory* at #15.

Andrew Cave reported on the phenomenon of Bookcrossing – leaving books in public places for others to take and read and then tracking them on the Internet via <http://www.bookcrossing.com>. He picked up on the fact that a copy of *The Bridge* was initially left on the Millennium Bridge in London.

The ‘Shelf Life’ series in **Scotland on Sunday** (17/09/06) looked at the reading habits of the broadcaster and author Billy Kay. Asked which authors he most admired the list consisted of: James Robertson; Irvine Welsh; Matthew Fitt; Willie McIlvanne; James Meek; Iain Banks, Michel Houellebecq “and a when ithers”.

Another month, another book survey; this time the Financial Mail, booksofcourse.com and NatWest generating a list of 50 “must-read” books for students. The results were reported in **The Mail on Sunday** (05/11/06), and the list was headed by George Orwell’s *1984*. The article went onto state “modern favourites, including Terry Pratchett, Iain Banks, Stephen King and Stephen Hawking, were not forgotten”

**The Herald** has an article series called ‘What I Spend My Money On’. When Donald Shaw of Capercaille was the subject (03/11/06) when he got to books he commented: “I enjoy quite dark stuff such as Cormac McCarthy, and I like Iain Crichton Smith, Sorley Maclean and Iain Banks.”

The BBC4 Science Fiction Britannia season included a three part history of British science fiction called *The Martians and Us*, that incorporated contributions from Iain Banks in the second programme that was subtitled: ‘Trouble in Paradise’, and looked at dystopias. Covering reasonably similar ground to the radio series *Imagining Albion*, there is little actual Banks content, but it is an interesting series worth watching.

Tom Little discussed the television drama output of BBC Scotland in an article in

**Scotland on Sunday** (19/11/06). He looked back at programmes such as *Tutti Fruti* and *The Crow Road*, and that seeing the first two parts of the latter on BBC4 “reminded me of the brilliance of not just the source material but also those who translated this most complex of tales to television”. He asked where the production of such programmes were coming from now, and compared the success of BBC Wales, with programmes such as *Life on Mars* and *Dr Who* with BBC Scotland, and concluded that Scottish licence fee payers are being short-changed.

Steven Poole in the **Guardian** (27/01/07) discussed the impact of immortality on the human condition in the light of recently published science books on and commented on that science fiction had already examined the such questions through the “colourful, scholarly, serially monogamous existences of very long-lived humans in the novels of Iain M Banks or Peter F Hamilton”.

On Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January there was a literary evening at The Savoy hosted by its new writer-in-residence, Michael Morpurgo OBE. The theme of the evening of words and music was ‘The Pursuit of Happiness’, and Jenny Agutter read “from Shakespeare, Emily Bronte, Roger McGough, William Blake, Oliver Postgate, Iain Banks and others”, and “Jeremy Polmear and Diana Ambache played from Purcell, Bach and Mozart to Ravel, Cole Porter and George Gershwin.” Tickets were £95 per person and include a champagne and canapé reception, a three course dinner with specially selected wine. Our London Society correspondent was otherwise engaged.

**Socialistworker.co.uk** reported that the organisers of the Stop the War conference in Glasgow on 10<sup>th</sup> February, took out “an advert in the Big Issue, paid for by one-off donations from a number of supporters, including author Iain Banks.”

*Hot Fuzz*, the new film from the makers of *Shaun of the Dead*, was released in the UK on Valentine’s Day, and has a character called Sergeant Turner played by Bill Bailey. In **The Guardian** (15/02/07) reviewer Peter Bradshaw picked out the “morose custody sergeant who does nothing but read Iain

Banks novels” as one of the “abysmal Sandford coppers”.

A short questionnaire type article appeared in the Saturday magazine of **The Independent** (17/02/07). Banks confirmed that he now drives a Lexus Hybrid SUV [If you want more detail it is an RX400h]. Despite the selling of his other vehicles he said that the “best invention ever” was “the wheel”, but also mentioned “word processors and spell-checks”, having admitted that he is quite bad at spelling, but good at letting off fireworks. Iain’s idea of movie heaven; “is subtitles. I like oldish French films with subtitles. I also like ancient Marx Brothers films.” The seemingly odd answer “All my money goes on ... exotic carpets”, is partly explained by a recent communication from Gary Lloyd concerning his work on the *Espedair Street* album, which mentioned recording in Iain’s “newly redesigned music room which features a plethora of Persian rugs and plenty o’ technology.” Banks reiterated his debt to Joseph Heller and Hunter S Thompson, by answering the question about “A book that changed me” with *Catch 22* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Interestingly a few weeks before Banks the photographer John Rankin Waddell answered the same question with: “*The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks. It made me realise I wanted to make films.”

The Armchair Anarchist, who contributed to the last issue of **The Banksoniain**, recently conducted an email interview with Ken MacLeod. The majority of the interview was published at: <http://www.sfsite.com/> but some of the material that didn’t make the final cut is now on his own website and includes some discussion of Iain Banks.

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

Andrew Grieg’s book, *Preferred Lies*, has a quote from Iain Banks on the cover which says; “Poignant, wise and funny, as well as exquisitely written...A book about golf about much more than golf”.

Podcasts, which are basically audio fanzines, focussing on Iain Banks can be found at [#3](http://www.phazecast.com), and <http://www.starshipsofa.com/#20>.

# Bridging Fantasies: The Fiction of Iain M. Banks

## Iain Banks Conference

The one day academic conference that focused on the work of Iain (M) Banks took place at the University of Westminster site on Regent's Street on Saturday 2nd September 2006.

The first paper of the day was titled: 'Landscape & Imagination: Iain Banks's rewriting of Argyll in *The Crow Road*'. It was given by Dr Tim Middleton of Bath Spa University and he reported on a project undertaken by the English department in conjunction with Artswork, which is the University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in the creative industries.

A short blog from the actual fieldwork phase of the project that took place in July 2006 is online at <http://thecrowroad.blogspot.com/>. It describes the project as a "locative journey through a fictional landscape". Basically they went to the real locations that are in the book, or locations that inspired the fictional locations in the book and took moving and still pictures along with GPS readings in order to create an interactive multimedia experience accessed via the Internet. The ultimate aim is for users to be able to use technology to tell them about the Crow Road related locations as they travel around the area.

In his paper Dr. Middleton discussed some of what he considered the more important locations of the book, whilst addressing the critical thesis that although a Scottish writer, Banks does not write about Scotland. Gaineamh Castle, where Fergus lives, is a pun in Gaelic with the name translating to sand castle, and noting its relative location to the Dunadd, an important site in Dalriada. He also discussed the names of the characters in relation to the history of Scotland. Fergus Mór was the Irish chief who founded the kingdom of Dalriada, whilst Kenneth MacAlpin was the name of the first king of the Scots, and suggests that the family saga of *The Crow Road* is a reflection of the founding of Scotland. The "ancient culture fits the novel too well for it to be a coincidence" he concluded.

During the second half of the morning there were two streams of papers in order to get through them all which meant that I had to skip the 'gender' session in order to attend the 'terror' one.

The first paper in this vein was from Dr. Robert Duggan entitled: 'Postmodernism, Iain (M.) Banks and the Gulf War'. He compared *Consider Phlebas* and *Look to Windward* in the context of the two Gulf Wars, and Baudrillard's analysis of them in the 1995 work, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Dr Duggan made a well argued case, but it is at times like this that I think that literary analysis of this type is telling you as much about the analyst than it does about their subject. The Koranic quotation, "Idolatry is worse than carnage" at the start of *Consider Phlebas* places the Iridians as analogous to Islam, and that the book is about religion as a cause of conflict. *Look to Windward*, he claimed, could be considered as an extension or revisioning of the earlier one, both in real and fictional chronology, with religion being replaced by caste.

Dr. William Stephenson's paper, 'Iain Banks and Terror' looked at the treatment of terrorism through the whole body of Banks's work, considering it largely symbolic. He started with the much maligned *Canal Dreams*, commenting that the destruction of her cello is more of a humiliation to Hisako Onoda than her rape, and the change in her personality that it produces leads her through a variety of weapons from wrench to missile launcher in an unrealistic portrayal that is meant as a metaphor for a duel with Capitalism. He also discussed the rarely analysed short stories *Piece* and *A Gift From the Culture* as well as *Consider Phlebas* and *Complicity*.

'I Have Never Been to Nasqueron' was the ironic title of Dr. James Kneale's paper presented to all the attendees, about the aerography, geography being precisely the wrong word, of the planet of the Dwellers. This is very alien to us, and very disorientating but not being entirely fictional

as it is based on our present understanding of Jupiter, the cover image being of that planet albeit turned through 90 degrees.

The first afternoon session was dominated by *The Wasp Factory*. Boris Kühne addressed the question of whether it was a Gothic novel or not. In doing this he looked at the symbology of the castle in the book, and pointed out that Father controls the bottom of the Cauldehulme family home and Frank the top, although eventually breeching Father's defences. Winding up he touched on the alternative gender systems in the work of Iain M. Banks. The Culture has the view that fixed genders are wasteful, and in *The Player of Games* we have the three gender system which creates a completely different gender economy, contrasted with Gurgeh who could change but chooses not to. Dr Monica Germana's paper also looked at the Gothic credentials of Banks's debut novel, with particular attention to the concept of the uncanny.

Dr Andrew M Butler's paper entitled, 'The Estranged Case of Mr Banks' looked at the concept of the divided self in the author's literature. Expounding that Banks's work is divided between his two names, he is a Scot writing in English, and he wrote Space Opera "the despicable end of a despised genre" before going on to resurrect the Utopia genre.

A roundtable at the end of the afternoon drew together the themes of the conference. The fact that *The Wasp Factory* was discussed the most over the day was considered inevitable with it being a high impact first novel. Some of his works were not mentioned at all, and there seems to be a hierarchy of his texts in terms of their academic study, and also in which are taught to students. The barrier between his M and non M work was considered to be artificial as the body of work is a continuum.

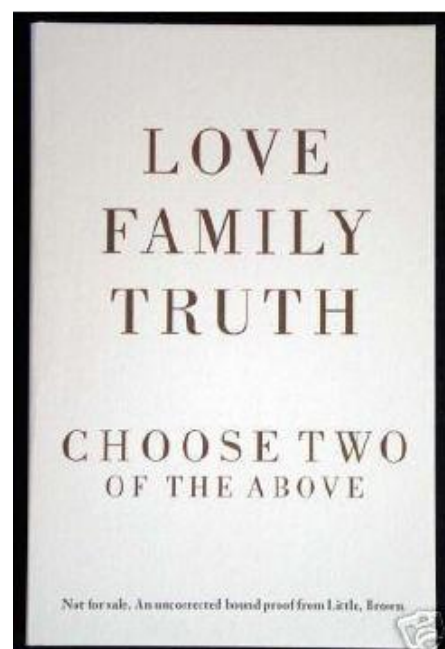
A Scottish publisher has shown interest in publishing the papers and the conference organisers are preparing a proposal for them, so watch this space and hopefully the concepts and theories of Banks's work discussed will eventually reach a wider audience than the attendees.

## The Crow Road Revisited

Just when you write a long article about something (see **The Banksonian** #10) then you find out a few more facts that would probably have made into the original article. The information about the locations of the novel from Tim Middleton's paper at the conference is covered in the previous article, but I recently discovered that *The Crow Road* gets Iain Banks a mention in the *Encyclopedia of Cremation*, apparently the "first major reference resource focused" on this particular subject. Edited by Douglas James Davies and Lewis H. Mates, and published by Ashgate (ISBN: 0754637735) the reference to Banks can be found in an entry on literature that cites works such as Tracy Chevalier's *Falling Angels*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Graham Greene's *Travels With My Aunt*.

## Garbadale - eBayWatch

The most interesting recent Banks sales on eBay have been the proof editions of *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* which started appearing in November 2006, and fetched a variety of prices, the highest being for a signed numbered limited edition copy (one of 150). These proofs, did not have the title of the book on the cover but instead the advertising line, "Love, Family, Truth. Choose two of the above". The name of the book and the author were then on the spine.



## Against A Dark Background

Banks's first published non-Culture science fiction novel was also the last of his reworked manuscripts, and was published in May 1993 by Orbit, and jointly promoted with the paperback edition of *The State of the Art*. In various interviews Iain has dated the initial writing of the novel to 1975, so the book has an interesting and somewhat convoluted 'biography', which we pick up in the partly-built porch of Ken MacLeod's parents.

Ken, in an interview published in May 2004<sup>1</sup>, told Andrew Adams an anecdote concerning the origins of the *Against a Dark Background*, which he dated to roughly 1973/1974 give or take a year. "There was one amazing afternoon, when there was an extension being built to our house in Greenock, and there were a couple of guys around building the porch, and Iain came round while I was helping out holding up the lights and so on (it was a dark cold afternoon). Iain told us the entire plot of the book over about three hours, and then went away. One of the carpenters said 'Who was that guy? Bloody strange friends you have.' I used to inflict similar things on him except they were much much vaguer: Iain had *Against a Dark Background* all worked out." Banks dates this to a year or so before writing the first draft, that he later described as being "overwritten and underthought"<sup>2</sup>, and eventually reworked nearly two decades later.

The reworking would have to be more substantial than was needed for *The Player of Games*, Banks explained to Isobel Murray<sup>3</sup>, a couple of years before he undertook it. One of the reasons he decided to do it was that he did not want to be predictable and write produce another Culture work at that particular time. In an interview with Stan Nicholls<sup>4</sup> before the publication of *Feersum Endjinn*, which is also non-Culture, he tackled this aspect at length. He admitted that both could have been set in the Culture, "Largely it's because I didn't want to get pigeon-holed writing only about the Culture. And it's what

everyone expects. I might get boring". He commented that "It's the last of the old stories, and it's quite a relief to have gotten them all out of the way", saying he was now free, "to start completely new stuff".

Banks himself summed up the premise behind the book in three short sentences. He commented: "It's an SF rendering of a fantasy plot - getting the gifted team together and going in search of things of power. I wanted to have that sort of scale and that breadth of canvas and to do it from a hard SF point of view. It's all completely relativistic, completely Einsteinian, there's no breaking of the light speed barrier at all."<sup>5</sup> He further stressed this point saying in an interview on Amazon that the book "was set up as a strict sci-fi novel which adhered to known physical laws and still does the template fantasy thing of heroes with superhuman powers questing after a McGuffin"<sup>6</sup>

The main McGuffin is the Lazy Gun, a long lost weapon of immense power that chooses to destroy what the user points at, zooms in on and then pulls the trigger at, in its own way, and often demonstrates a sense of humour in how the person / object is dispatched, although when it comes to whole cities its methods are somewhat limited. Only one of the eight Lazy Guns still exists, the others being destroyed in various odd ways, but its location is lost and it is this weapon that the Lady Sharrow, "from one of the disreputable aristocratic families" according to the blurb, seeks, although along the way she and her team have to find other items that point to the gun's location. The reason she is looking for the gun is to get a religious cult off her back as they have taken out a licence, valid for a year, to assassinate her as they believe that their messiah cannot be born until her bloodline has been eliminated. It was the Lazy Gun, "a piece of daftness that I wanted to make use of", as he told Stan Nicholls, that was one of the driving forces behind going to

<sup>1</sup> Emerald City #S01.

<sup>2</sup> Science Fiction Chronicle, October 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Writers Talking 2.

<sup>4</sup> Starlog, December 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mary Branscombe in SFX #1, June 1995.

<sup>6</sup> 'A Man of Culture' un-credited interview at [http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/feature/-/67383/ref=ed\\_art\\_135796\\_txt\\_1/](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/tg/feature/-/67383/ref=ed_art_135796_txt_1/)

the effort of reworking his 1975 draft, adding, "Ideas like that are worth the anguish of writing the whole thing again"<sup>4</sup>. *Against a Dark Background* is therefore, a "multiple quest novel", but one that Banks claims uses, "the tropes of science fiction to deconstruct fantasy"<sup>7</sup>. The magical elements take, "the well-known idea that Arthur C Clarke had ... that the technology of an advanced civilization would look like magic to a less advanced civilization."<sup>4</sup>

It is also one of the few of his books to have never had a different title considered for it, with Banks having this one in his head for some time and waiting for the right book to come along to attach it to. There has been speculation that the source of the title was an Ursula Le Guin essay 'Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown' in which she discusses female characterisation and concludes: "I think science fiction is - well, no, not important, yet still worth talking about, because it is a promise of continued life for the imagination, a good tool, an enlargement of consciousness, a possible glimpse, against a vast dark background, of the very frail, very heroic figure of Mrs Brown."

The setting for the book is the Golterian system that is isolated from the rest of the galaxy to such an extent that there are no visible stars, literarily the dark background of the title. The planet is coming up to its decamillennial celebrations, i.e. the year 10,000, Banks got his 'millennial' story in bigger and earlier than everyone else.

The review by Chris Gilmore in **Foundation #61** concluded that it would have been nice if a map of Golter, the main planet, in the system had been included in order to follow the progress of the adventures, and speculated that it could be included if there was to be a sequel. He had earlier summed the book up by saying, "the body count is high, loose-ends are few and look intentional, and as for the rest ... it is by Iain Banks." A number of other commentators also thought that the somewhat abrupt ending left the story deliberately open and expected there to be a follow-up.

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<sup>7</sup> Vox #33 (June 1993) Interview with Mike Pattendea.

Rather than a complete sequel to the 487 page book, there is a seventeen hundred word epilogue for the book that was originally published in *A Mexicon Decade*, an anthology of original pieces by past Mexicon convention guests to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the first convention of that name. The 44 page souvenir book that includes contributions from Ian McDonald, Norman Spinrad and Colin Greenland was edited by Colin Harris and the limited edition of 400 initially distributed at Mexicon 6, in May 1994. The epilogue was written the year after the reworking had been completed. If you want a published copy then try Porcupine Books <http://www.porcupine.demon.co.uk/> for the Mexicon souvenir book, or look for a copy of the Night Shade Books, (i.e. the US) limited edition of *The State of the Art*. The epilogue mirrors the prologue of the book with Sharrow on a cable car, and throws a bit more light on the original ending that left some a little dazed and confused.

An interesting diversion in the story of *Against a Dark Background*, is that there were plans to make it into a computer game. Nick Martinelli, who works in the film and TV industry (amongst his credits is Visual Effects Art Director on season three of the TV series *Farscape*) got as far as creating some development drawings and plotting proposals back in 1999, but since then has been little movement on the project. Gary Lloyd was lined up to do the music for the game.

The book has been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Hungarian and Russian, as well as having a separate US edition. The German edition, *Vor einem dunklen Hintergrund*, came second in the translation category of their Kurd Lasswitz awards, Horst Pukallus missing out in 1999 won the next year when he teamed up with Michael K. Iwoleit to win for their translation of *Foerchtbar Maschien* (Feersum Enjinn).

Finally to return to the beginning of the work and also its early history, the dedicatee is Dave McCartney. Banks explained that he was "another of my best friends from sunny Greenock", and that the book, "had always been his favourite of my SF novels"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Culture #6, p15.

## Mark Lawson Talks To Iain Banks

This programme went out on the UK digital TV channel BBC4, previously called BBC Knowledge, which “aims to offer an intelligent alternative to programmes on the mainstream TV channels” in their ‘Science Fiction Britannia’ season of programmes fiction in November 2006.

Mr Lawson is one of the BBC’s main arts journalists, presenting the magazine programme *Front Row* on BBC radio 4. His series on BBC4 has seen him ‘talk to’ the likes of Ridley Scott, Griff Rhys Jones, Michael Palin, Jilly Cooper, Engelbert Humperdinck and Phillip Roth. He met Iain Banks in what looked like a windowless basement hastily decorated with some flowers.



The introduction saw Mark talk about the difference between the two bodies of work, and Iain related the story of the M, mentioning that his father forgot to register him as Menzies and so on his birth certificate he is just Iain Banks. The pair then discussed the process of his work and Iain reiterated that he approaches each book in the same way and the tools he uses are the same, but produce a different result. Mark then introduced the concept of snobbery within the ‘mainstream’ work, with *The Wasp Factory* being dismissed by some as horror and *Complicity* as a thriller, but Iain professed to not being bothered as he generally finds a readership.

The subject then turned to his childhood and the sort of book he enjoyed then. Iain said he read everything and anything, not really discovering science fiction until he was 12/13, before that he read Biggles and Alistair MacLean, as well as the Reader’s Digest that his parents subscribed to. Lawson picked up

on this aspect and began to describe Banks’s adult political views: “left-wing, a humanist, a secularist”, before Iain interrupted with “evangelical atheist”. Mark then postulated that this could be a reaction to a conservative Presbyterian upbringing, to which Iain replied “No, not at all.” Adding that his mother goes to church, but his father doesn’t and when he finally asked why, and discovered there was a choice it was a great revelation to him. Iain then had to stress that *The Wasp Factory* is not autobiographical, before they talked about his very early unpublished works; *The Hungarian Lift-Jet* and *TTR*, aka *The Tashkent Rambler*.

Iain whilst talking about his background and politics then talked about going green and getting rid of his ‘fleet’ of vehicles and replacing them with a hybrid. This was picked up by the press (see Media Scanner, p#3). Mark then brought up that his lack of passport had a ‘green’ by-product of his not travelling abroad and Iain said that he found that he did not miss it, and added that a year after sending his passport to Tony Blair in pieces he got an invite to a reception at Number 10, but refused.

Moving onto Banks’s time at university they briefly discussed the subjects that he studied; English, Philosophy and Psychology, all chosen to help make him a better writer, although the Psychology turned out to be about statistics. Iain admitted that he got better marks at Philosophy probably because he could waffle more and in English it helped if you had actually read the books.

Lawson then moved on to talk about whisky and rock music, assuming that Banks was in a band he was surprised when Iain said that he wasn’t, but the author explained this by saying that he always wanted to be in control and would not have got this in a group, although he claimed he might have been a decent bass player. A clip from the end of Iain’s specialist subject round on Celebrity Mastermind was shown, before they moved on to discuss *The Wasp Factory* and its publication, with Iain describing the internal debate he had with himself to before writing a

non-SF work, and how to pragmatic side of himself won and rationalised it as a “beachhead” into publishing, which would allow him to get the other works into print.

At this point a clip was played from the edition of *Bookmark*, first broadcast on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1984, in which parts of *The Wasp Factory* were dramatised. It is good to know that the programme still survives in the BBC archives and it would be interesting to see the whole thing.



Mark asked about the background to the book and how it developed. Iain went into some detail about how it was an amalgamation of many things to do with the nature versus nurture debate, and also male violence, commenting that the Greenham Common protests and banners saying “take the toys from the boys” struck a chord and chimed with him. He added that it also about religion with Frank having his own which is “just as mad as the rest”. Lawson then moved on to discuss the impact that the novel had, and the reviews that it got which were publicised in the paperback edition, with Iain observing that when a paperback edition was published without them people complained to him and he had to contact his publishers to get them put back.

The interview jumped to 1987 missing out *Walking on Glass* and *The Bridge* to discuss Banks’s first published SF novel, which he said was a reaction to both America right-wing space opera and British grim Communist futures. Banks wanted to portray “a profoundly Socialist future that was brilliant fun”. Moving onto his Scottishness Banks went to great lengths to say how much of a privilege it was to write in English as it is such a fabulous language, and compared to Norwegian (as you cannot make a living

writing SF in that language) but that not being English allows a writer to sit on both sides of the fence when it comes to post-Imperialist hang-ups. Lawson later picked up on Iain’s vocal portrayal of pretentiousness that comes with an English accent.

Iain’s views on religion and the way that although he is entertaining he gets to expound on his own ideas were then explored, illustrated with a clip of *The Crow Road* TV series in which Uncle Hamish was working through his plea to the Lord to visit his wrath on the Khmer Rouge. Banks admitted that it is interesting exercise to have to put across ideas that you do not agree with, and that the act of writing a point of view down can subtly change the writer’s thoughts.

The Banks, three months on / nine months off, writing routine was then briefly covered before the subject of competition with other writers was discussed with Iain saying he only really writes for himself and that everything is subjective anyway, before they meandered onto the subject of book awards. Iain professed not to be bothered, saying that writing science fiction is not the way of getting onto the Booker shortlist, but did admit to feeling slightly aggrieved that his favourite work, *The Bridge*, was never shortlisted for anything.

Iain got onto a roll at the end of the interview, when asked about his ambitions as a writer he went on to talk about his music, expressing a desire to write a symphony, or rather four, do that the last could be the Forth, and would be about the river. Novels would still be his “bread and butter”, and it would not distract him from that, but he did mention the *Espedair Street* soundtrack project he is working on with Gary Lloyd. At the end Lawson seemed relieved to find a pause in which to interject “Iain Banks, thank you very much.”

Interestingly the BBC4 schedulers chose to have the first two episodes of the BBC’s adaptation of *The Crow Road* before the first broadcast of the Mark Lawson interview. This shows up the glaring lack of visual interpretations of the works of Iain M Banks on both the small and large screen.

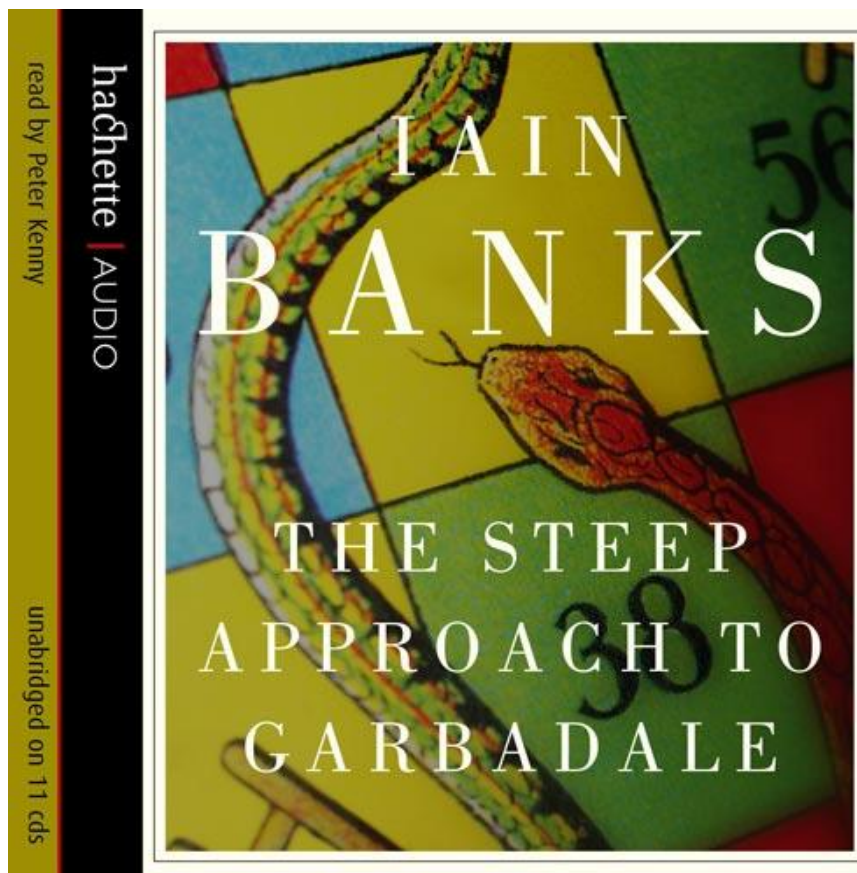
## The Steep Approach to Garbadale – Audiobook

As if the fashion nowadays an audiobook book is accompanying the hardback publication of *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, however, in a first for Banks this release is an unabridged one. The days of a double cassette abridgement seem to be long gone, and this is a CD only release, with Hachette Audio presumably expecting listeners to rip it to their MP3 player.

The narrator is Peter Kenny born in Scotland to Irish parents he now lives in London so easily covers the range of main characters in the book, and he recorded the work over six, eight-hour days to produce the final product which is thirteen hours of reading. Peter is no stranger to the works of Iain Banks. Professionally he has narrated unabridged recordings of *Look to Windward* and *The Wasp Factory* for a charity called Listening Books, which is a postal audio book library service for people who cannot read in the normal way.

As a reader he has worked his way through the whole works of Iain M Banks, and a good selection of the mainstream works, and when asked to compare this work with Banks's others Peter said that he was not a critic but then commented that he definitely recognised the narrative style with the story being built up slowly through flashbacks and reportage before being brought together at the end. His conclusion was; "I think fans and new readers will enjoy it alike."

You can hear more of Peter Kenny on a variety of audiobooks, including; *Pig Island* by Mo Hayder, *Mother's Milk* by Edmund St Aubyn and *The Wrong Boy* by Willy Russell. On the educational kids website [www.direct.gov.uk/kids](http://www.direct.gov.uk/kids) which we will have its launch in March, although it is available now, Peter plays all the male characters including the police dog called Buster who is the help icon.



The Steep Approach to Garbadale, by Iain Banks, read by Peter Kenny.  
Unabridged on 11CDs from Hachette Audio. ISBN: 1405501251; RRP: £25.00

## The Steep Approach to Garbadale – Publicity

**N.B.** May contain spoilers, as it discusses the publicity for the book.

Iain read and talked about the book at the Edinburgh Book Festival last year (see Coercri's report in **The Banksoniain** #10). He also made appearances at the inaugural Linlithgow (16/09/06), the Wells Literature Festival (13/10/06) and the Àrainn Shuaineirt Book Festival in Strontian (25/11/06). A short (11 minute) interview conducted by BBC Somerset at the time of the Wells event is available at:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/somerset/realmedia/2006/10/iain\\_banks.ram](http://www.bbc.co.uk/somerset/realmedia/2006/10/iain_banks.ram)

The first proofs appeared on eBay towards the end of November 2006, so presumably they had gone out to reviewers and buyers about this time. This produced some coverage in early January with articles in the major national papers looking forward to the publishing year listing *Garbadale* as one to watch out for in March. The prize for the earliest mention goes to Melissa McClements of **The Financial Times** (30/12/06) which commented "Chilling, funny and incredibly imaginative ... bewitching saga about the Wopulds". The publicity machine then stepped up a gear in the New Year and interviews and profiles began to appear at the beginning of February.

Issue #23 of Waterstone's magazine, **Books Quarterly**, included an interview and short review, and most of the signing events (listed overleaf) that Banks is undertaking appear to be at the bookshop chain's stores. In the interview Iain claimed that, "this is one of the nice ones". This is, of course, all relative in Banks terms, with the extract that appeared on his official website presumably being one of the darker parts of the story; think Virginia Woolf.

The **Books Quarterly** interview revealed that the book has scenes in Thailand, Hong Kong and England as well as Scotland. *Garbadale*, is the made up location for the climax of the novel, and the lake by it is "based on Loch Shiel" but like in *The Crow Road* Banks has moved the Scottish topography around, "I

love altering the landscape". In Thailand the story touches on the 2005 tsunami, providing a particular aspect to the backstory of one character as well developing the water symbolism of the story. Claire Armistead's article also indicated that the family tree of the Wopulds looks to be much more complicated than the McHoans, so it may be that after documenting the relationships a genealogical diagram may well be in order. The final paragraph covered the *Espedair Street* tribute album project that he and musician Gary Lloyd are working on.

**The Independent** had its Saturday Magazine questionnaire (covered in the media Scanner column on page #3 as it is not *Garbadale* related) and a separate article by Liz Hoggard in the Sunday edition (18/02/07). This three column interview described his as the "Tarantino of the book world", mentioned that his dress sense has got better since being prompted by "pal Les", and that his paperback print runs are in the region of 200,000 copies. Discussing *Garbadale* in the final third, the interviewer described the novel as being "full of the turbulence of first love" and that Banks admitted being nervous about writing some of the flashback scenes where the main protagonist is just 14 years old.

An article in **The Times** (17/02/07) by Tom Gatti produced more substantial information about Banks's new work. It was initially going to stress the game metaphor in a more "weird and wonderful" way, by having the characters "trapped inside a game", quoting, to the interviewers acknowledged surprise, Banks as comparing this to the Robin William film *Jumanji*. Apparently this plot device did not work and the game motif became more symbolic. Banks admitted that he would like to write something like *The Bridge* again, saying that the sorts of books he writes "are driven by ideas and not characters", the author also expressed admiration for *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell with its various techniques and voices, which made him feel "slightly jealous, and that doesn't happen often".

Banks filmed a ninety-second talking head video of him expounding the basic premise of the book for the 'Meet the Author' website – see <http://www.meettheauthor.com>, and also made available via some bookselling websites. He revealed that the main action of the novel takes place “towards the tail end of 2005”. There is another to camera piece by him about *The Algebraist* on the same website.

Some quarters of the press took the opportunity to focus on the fact that Banks has split up from his wife and has a new girlfriend. **The Daily Mail** (19/02/07) had a particularly sloppily put together article which managing to ignore the 2005 book by completely different writer Iain M Banks, *The Algebraist*, looked at the publication dates of *Dead Air* (2002) and *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* (2007) to come up with the statement, “The prolific author, who on average produces a book a year, spent five years over his latest novel”. Utter Tosh!

During Marian Finucane’s show on the Irish radio station RTE 1 on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January *Garbadale* was mentioned in the book slot that was looking forward to the year’s releases by talking to a couple of bookbuyers.

A special hardback edition (ISBN: 9780316027786) and possibly only available at Waterstone’s will be on sale along with the basic hardback, the export trade paperback and the audiobook on March 1<sup>st</sup>. The expensive version is listed at £30 and does not appear to be discounted at all, unlike the £17.99 hardback is. Waterstone’s do seem to have a policy of producing ‘exclusive’ slipcased editions so this maybe worth investigating.

The audiobook cover is shown on page # 10. The snakes and ladders motif, well mainly snakes, illustrates the game background to the family and the book. The numbers on the part of the board do not appear to make sense with the 56 being one square above and to the right of the 38, which is not any arrangement I could reproduce without creating an extremely odd board. So perhaps it is symbolic, or maybe the artist has some points on his licence.

## Tour Dates

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February; 6:30pm AyeWrite Book Festival, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February; 6:45pm Herald Book Series, Roxburghe Hotel, Edinburgh.

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> March; 8:30pm Bath Literature Festival, Guildhall, Bath.

Monday 5<sup>th</sup> March; 6:30pm The Old Market, Hove.

Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> March; 7pm Waterstone’s Piccadilly, London.

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> March; 6:30pm Centre for Creative and Performing Arts Literary Festival, University of East Anglia, Norwich.

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> March; 7pm Waterstone’s Deansgate, Manchester.

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> March; 7pm Waterstone’s Albion Street, Leeds.

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March; 7pm Ottakars (Waterstone’s) Peascod Street, Windsor.

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> March; 7:30pm Essex Book Festival, Mercury Theatre, Colchester.

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March; 7:30pm Waterstone’s Broad Street, Oxford.

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March; 7pm Waterstone’s New George Street, Plymouth.

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May; 7:30pm Eastwood Park Theatre, Glasgow.

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June; 6:30pm Nairn Book & Arts Festival, Newton Hotel, Nairn.

August (sometime) Edinburgh Book Festival.

**N.B.** Other events may be available, and if known will be listed on **The Banksoniain** calendar available at:

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

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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@gmail.com](mailto:banksoniain@gmail.com)

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