

The Banksoniain #13

An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

February 2008

Editorial

The new book *Matter* is out and we have a timeline of its development, news of the initial reaction and publicity interviews. The details of the short book tour are the other side of the column divider.

Many Banks events to report on, including his return to the convention circuit as the Guest of Honour at Mecon X as well as his Cheltenham Literary Festival appearance and the recent Scottish Government event in Brussels. Forthcoming Banks appearances are listed on the back page.

The Wasp Factory returns to the stage with a tour of Scotland in the second quarter of the year by a troupe from the Cumbernauld Theatre in association with the Tron Theatre. **The Banksoniain** takes the opportunity to look back at previous productions, giving over the centre page spread to the history of the stage versions of the story.

Thanks for this issue to Nicholas Whyte for his Brussels report, and quarsan for his MP3s and photos. George Walkley and Sarah Shrubbs at Hachette / Orbit have been particularly helpful, as was Julie Burton at MacAdam Cage. Thanks, of course, to Iain (M.) Banks himself.

Lookout for issue #14 in August 2008 with a book biography of *Feersum Endjinn*, have more reaction to *Matter*, and hopefully a review of *The Wasp Factory* on stage. If you wish to contribute then please contact the editor. See page #12.

STOP PRESS

Paul Cornell reported on his blog (21/02/08) that he has been commissioned by BBC Radio 4 to adapt the novella *The State of the Art* into a play for broadcast later this year.

Banks's Next Book

Now that *Matter* has been published the next book will be a non-M one. An interview in **The Guardian** (07/02/08) mentioned that he will probably begin to put finger to keyboard around October 2008.

However, there is the prospect of Iain returning to a shorter form in the meantime as Iain is amongst the thirty "world's greatest authors" that will be contributed to six books the human rights organisation is publishing in August 2008 to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The writers have been asked to interpret real life stories of injustice, freedom and remarkable heroism. The project is called **BLOODlikeWATER**, and its progress will be charted at: <http://bloodlikewater.com/>

Matter UK Tour

18:30 Monday 25 February
City Books, The Old Market, Upper Market Street, Hove. Tickets: £6, including a complimentary glass of wine.
info@citybookshove.co.uk

19:00 Tuesday 26 February
Waterstone's 11a Union Galleries, Broadmead, Bristol. Tickets: £3, redeemable against the purchase of a book.
enquiries@bristolgalleries.waterstones.com

19:00 Wednesday 27 February
Waterstone's, Castle Street, Norwich. Tickets: £3, redeemable against the purchase of the book.
enquiries@norwich-castlestreet.waterstones.com

19:00 Thursday 28 February
Waterstone's 297A High St, Lincoln. Tickets: £3, redeemable against the purchase of the book.
enquiries@lincoln-highstreet.waterstones.com

Media Scanner

The **Evening Standard** (16/08/07) reported on Banks's comment at the Edinburgh Book Festival that the author had obtained a passport and would be off to Venice in October.

Duncan Fairweather précised *Garbadale* for **Community Care** (15/08/07) but still declared the book had "enough psychodynamics to interest social care workers".

The reports of JK Rowling perhaps turning her post Harry Potter writing to the crime genre saw **The Sunday Times** (19/08/07) describe the genre as, "dominated by some of Scotland's greatest storytellers from Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert Louis Stevenson to modern bestselling writers including Ian Rankin, Alexander McCall Smith, Iain Banks and Val McDermid."

The Times (20/08/07) reported on the series of Amnesty International readings at the Edinburgh Book Festival and said that Banks "read from a first-hand account of the Andijan killings in Uzbekistan, and a reading from the last, unfinished work of Anna Politkovskaya, the Russian journalist who was murdered last October."

Henry Deeds in **The Independent** (20/08/07) reported on Iain Rankin describing **The Wasp Factory** as "quite grotesque" when talking about young writers getting noticed by shocking audiences.

The influence of Iain M Banks on three students from South East Essex College was described in the **Southend Standard** (22/08/07). They won a competition to design a futuristic games console and came up with *The Dreamer* that used nanobots to connect to the user's brain, and were quoted as saying: "we took our influence from the world of sci-fi, such as the Matrix, I, Robot and the work of Iain M Banks."

John Patterson in **The Guardian** (07/09/07) bemoaned the fact that *Children of Men*, *Live Flesh* and *Le Serpent* were not British films saying, "we need to stop letting foreign filmmakers snaffle all our best stories." In a 1500 word article he asked British filmmakers to

"forswear Shakespeare and Austen, and adapt some of the splendid material that's cheaply available here at home". Then, he continued, "someone might start filming the odd Iain Banks novel."

Frank Carter, the vocalist of Gallows, in an interview in **The Independent** (28/09/07) claimed "Iain Banks, Roald Dahl and Shakespeare are his lyrical influences".

Simon Turnbull interviewed Gregor Townsend for **The Independent** (01/10/07) about the publication of the latter's autobiography. Making the point of saying it was not ghost-written he asked about literary influences to which the rugby player replied: "I enjoy Scottish authors like Ian Rankin and Iain Banks, but Douglas Coupland has been the biggest influence, as I quote him in the book."

The end of the year-long protests at HM Naval Base Clyde was reported on by Charlene Sweeney in **The Times** (02/10/07) and noted the blockade had "attracted high profile supporters including writer Iain Banks, actress Emma Thompson and singer Billy Bragg."

The **Morning Star** (06/10/07) in their coverage of the planned Stop the War Coalition march that was banned quoted Banks as saying: "It's becoming remarkably hard to escape the feeling we're ruled by people who are basically paranoid authoritarian incompetents."

On 08/10/07 the Stop the War coalition published as an advert in **The Guardian** the text of a letter signed by many famous people including Banks urging the Gordon Brown to use his October statement to break from the foreign policy of George Bush.

Politics was the angle that the **Gloucestershire Echo** (16/10/07) took in reporting Banks's Cheltenham Book Festival appearance commenting that he now had a passport after Gordon Brown was PM and that the author added "I'm not even the most famous man in my village."

The Bookseller (02/11/07) looked forward to February 2008 and in what it called "heavily populated month" said the highlights would

be: “new novels from Iain M Banks, Joanna Trollope and Tony Parsons, and, on the literary side, from Peter Carey and Linda Grant.” Science Fiction not being literary again.

The vintage book chart from **The Times** (03/11/07) reminded readers that Whit was #5 back in the equivalent week from 1995 and described by the Sunday Times as “Banks's least violent to date.”

The Scotsman (08/11/07) reported that Iain had joined Tony Benn, George Galloway, Bashir Mann, convener of the Muslim Council of Scotland and human rights lawyer Gareth Pierce, among others, to appeal to the courts to stop pursuing lawyer Aamer Anwar who is facing a contempt of court charge for speaking out against a series of verdicts.

The **Evening Standard** (19/11/07) has a list of books of the year. In Mark Sanderson's picks he described *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* as “a great big family saga, not without trauma, of course, but written with exuberance and wit.”

Rob Deering describing his cultural life in **Scotland on Sunday** (25/11/07) was asked about a book you have read more than once “I recently reread *The Crow Road* by Iain Banks - great, but the main character has got so much younger than me in the years since I read it last. Very depressing, particularly in a book about mortality.”

The 3rd Utopias Conference, which took place in early December 2007 at Monash University in Australia, saw two papers on Iain M. Banks presented. Michael Kulbicki's contribution was called: *Iain M Banks, Utopia, and Critical Hope*, whilst David Farnell concentrated on one book with his, *The Morality of Preemptive Regime Change in Iain M. Banks' The Player of Games*.

Bryan Appleyard in **The Times** (02/12/07) asked ‘Why don't we love science fiction?’ and in his discussion commented that “Banks's emphasis is more philosophical than strictly scientific.”

Banks was a signatory, along with other writers, to a letter in **The Guardian** (07/12/07) supporting the freedom of speech

of Samina Malik, also known as The Lyrical Terrorist. The letter commented that her “thought experiment” has been central to her conviction, and likened it to Martin Amis's anti-muslim comments.

Rod Liddle in **The Sunday Times** (30/12/07) discussing the New Year's Honours list under the headline, “Kylie OBE - a gong for a simple bit of bottom exposure”, commented “Martin Amis, Iain Banks and, strange to say, JG Ballard have never been honoured”, before he attacked Hanif Kureishi by continuing: “some people might argue that they have performed a greater service to literature over the years than Kureishi. Some people might even remember the name of a book one of them has written, which gives them the distinct edge over Hanif.” N.B. At least one of those on Liddle's wish list has turned one down.

Another list, this time the “50 Greatest British Writers Since 1945”, was published in **The Times** (05/01/08) and Banks was included at #38, one place below Hanif Kureishi CBE.

The Herald (19/01/08), announced the shortlist for the first Clare Maclean Prize for Scottish Fiction. The £3,000 will be awarded at the last event of AyeWrite, the Glasgow Book Festival, to one of the following six books: *Old Men in Love* by Alasdair Gray, *Girl Meets Boy* by Ali Smith, *Gold* by Dan Rhodes, *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* by Iain Banks, *The Devil's Footprints* by John Burnside, and *Day* by AL Kennedy. The judging panel is headed by Mike Gonzalez is Professor of Latin American Studies at Glasgow University, who is joined by Rosemary Goring, Literary Editor of **The Herald**, and Rob Maslen, Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Glasgow University.

A blog comment on **The Guardian's** film page at the end of January bemoaning the naming of the twenty-third James Bond film, as *Quantum of Solace*, mentioned that it sounded more like an Iain M. Banks book.

Timothy Burke's new Spring 2008 course, *The History of Leisure and Play*, at Swarthmore College uses *The Player of Games* as a text in its last week looking at the future of leisure.

Cheltenham Literature Festival

Iain limped onto the stage as he had had an accident on his motorbike a couple of weeks before, and commented that he was going to get rid of it (meaning the bike). In an interview with BBC Gloucester afterwards he described the incident as a yellow card, and that it would be better for all concerned if he stopped riding it as he was always rusty because he preferred hill-walking to riding nowadays. He also said he had spectacular bruising from his bottom to the sole of his foot.

The interviewer began by talking about *Garbadale*. Banks admitted that he had deviated from his notes/plan as he had originally planned to make Grandma Win really horrible than she eventually turned out. Usually he commented, in his books the baddies are guys and he wanted to explore having an elderly female character that would be expected to be protective and loving, and to have them be actively nasty, but in the end the way the plot worked out it didn't need to be like that.

A particularly interesting question, Banks usually points out those that make him think by saying he does not have a stock/glib answer to them, was when he was asked about his interest in mathematics came from. The questioner cited the character VG from *Garbadale* and the whole premise of *The Algebraist*. Iain replied that he had not been good at the subject until O levels when he got a good grade but was rubbish again at Higher level so admires those that are good at maths. He then digressed into marvelling that there was such a thing as the philosophy of mathematics and how it was a mark of human civilisation.

What Drives Them to Write?

Penny Wark in *The Times* (09/10/07) collated responses from many of the authors at the Cheltenham Literary Festival to this question. Iain Banks was one of the respondees, and the enlightening answer deserves reprinting in full.

"I get my ideas from the same places as everyone else, from the interaction of reality,

life as you live it, and imagination. For writers, especially if you're working on a linear form like the novel, it's a definite advantage to be able to spot large scale patterns around you. That requires a degree of being an outsider, you have to stand back from society and from families or whatever it is you want to write about to be able to see those patterns.

I spend three, six, sometimes nine months working on notes and a plan so that when I sit down to write it I know where I'm going. Often you imagine detail beyond the notes, you've talked your way through scenes and if it's a dialogue, that's in your head. Part of it's created in real time but most of it, the strategic structure, is there before I sit down to type it.

The most pure intellectual joy is looking at a page of ideas and seeing a link - it's like breaking through to a new level, you've suddenly added a complexity that makes it much more than the sum of its parts. I have to confess to a degree of trepidation to admit to being self-serving, but sometimes I'm writing a dialogue scene and it's meant to be funny and I make myself laugh at an unexpected turn. It may just show extreme egocentricity but that's a very good feeling.

When you get something just right it's coming out of all the different systems inside your head working together. What you want is to be totally consumed in what you're doing, your whole mind is working to the same end, this is the rational pattern spotting and pattern determining bits that are working in harmony with the bits that are alive to emotional nuances, then you probably are going to be able to create something that's going to work on all levels.

It's not as pleasurable as it used to be. It took several novels for it to dawn on me that it wasn't a lark any more, it was my profession and there were people out there, sales reps and my publisher, waiting for the next book. In your own small way as a writer you have to make their lives viable. Particularly, your fans are waiting, there's that expectation. But I feel very privileged to be able to do what I love doing and get paid for it. You can't ask for much more."

Banks in Brussels

Nicholas Whyte went to the Banks event at Scotland House, and blogged this report. Reprinted (with edits, but without the questions) by permission.

The actual lecture room was filled up, with a dozen people left standing at the back after the 150 or so seats were taken; we were welcomed formally by the jolly Linda Fabiani, Scotland's Minister for Europe and Culture, and then Iain Banks immediately began by standing up and dominating the entire room, leaving the unfortunate Scottish attaché for fisheries and agriculture (nominally chairing the meeting) cowering in his seat and attempting to interject the occasional question.

We started with the issue of writing - the Minister had fired off a question in her introductory remarks: was it true that Banks just writes until he finishes, rather than editing as he goes, and the chairman added, was it true that he only spent three months a year writing? Banks said defensively that it may look like he only spends three months writing, and spends the rest of the time wandering the hills, eating curries, etc; but in reality he takes three months off a year, lying fallow, his own personal "set-aside" scheme; then three months thinking about thinking about the book, "to let the mulch settle in the recesses of my brain"; then three months thinking about writing; then three months actually writing; a system he has arrived at by trial and error - "mostly error". He told the story of his first, unpublished, novel, written as a teenager, and of his occasional fetish of knowing the last line of the book well in advance.

But then he turned to the Minister's question, and said that indeed, he does write to the end and only then go back and edit what has been done. There is no such thing as a perfect novel. You can have a perfect poem, so it is worth putting in the effort to try and get a poem to the right degree of perfection, but you will never achieve that with a novel, and too much editing en route means you will never finish.

He then read the Paris scene from *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, and remarked that he had given very few of the characters "normal names", so as not to be sued - "We live in litigious days." The Wopuld family in the book are named after his own frequent mistyping of the word "would". He then allowed the chair to start taking questions from the audience.

MP3s of the event are available at <http://www.blairwatch.co.uk/node/1962> where there is also a link to a set of 11 photos from the meeting on Flickr one of which is reproduced, with permission, below.



Banks caught in mid explanation
by quarsan of www.blairwatch.co.uk

Another attendee that blogged about their presence at the event was the organiser of the 2009 incarnation of Beneluxcon. He hopes to have Iain as the Guest of Honour for the event in Belgium currently at the early planning stages. So look out to see if that comes to pass in future diary listings.

Wasp Factory on Stage

Exciting news from the Scottish theatre scene is that the stage production of *The Wasp Factory* is touring Scottish theatres in the second quarter of 2008. Cumbernauld Theatre are mounting a production of the Malcolm Sutherland adaptation of Iain Banks's first published novel that was first performed at the Citizens' 2 Theatre in Glasgow in 1992. This history discusses the adaptation and staging so might give surprises away if you plan to see the 2008 production, and have not seen an earlier ones.

1992/1993 Original Production

Malcolm Sutherland adapted the book into a play, and made some bold choices for the run between 3 and 27 September. Frank was portrayed by multiple actors, Raji James and Daniel Illsley, and an aerialist, Angela Bullock, making up the whole of the on stage cast, with voices of the other characters being supplied by recordings and/or Bullock with puppets from the gantry. Peter McCaughey and Ross Macrae, produced video installations that were displayed on 10 screens around the set and provided representations of certain plot elements difficult to portray with such a small cast.

Pre-publicity saw John Linklater in **The Herald** (03/08/92) musing on whether "the first theatre adaptation of Iain Banks's abhorrent novel ... a book of stunning tastelessness" would "be an interesting test of the rule that does not prohibit bad prose from making good theatre". When the show was performed **The Times** (12/09/92) gave it a rave review, with Martin Hoyle stating it was "fascinatingly macabre 65 minutes of superbly drilled physical theatre". **The Herald** (10/09/92) reported on a Q&A session held by the original author and the adaptor/director after one of these early performances. "As the Citizens' front-of-house person sought to draw the chat to a close, Mrs Banks piped up: 'Iain, do you not think you should say thank-you to the actors?' Needless to say, Banks dutifully did just that."

The show was booked out on its initial run and revived at the same theatre but in the

Circle Studio for almost a full month between February 18 and March 14 1993. Daniel Illsley reprised his role and was joined this time by Craig Kelly and Lucy Allen. The production was then staged in London with performances at Bagley's Warehouse later that year in November with Paul Hunter replacing Craig Kelly.

1996

A production by Northern Stage in 1996 generated the headline: "Warning Sounded Over Shocker Play" in the **Northern Echo** (13/02/96) during its short tour of the North-East.

1997 Revival

Sutherland continued to develop the play and directed it again when invited by Jude Kelly to put on at a bigger stage, The West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, in April/May 1997. Martin Freeman, who went onto star on TV in *The Office* and on film in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* played Frank along with Tom Smith. Frank's father, Angus, finally appeared on stage in the guise of David Gant.

The Leeds production saw the theatre equipped out as a cybercafé, a newsworthy event over a decade ago, with an article in **The Times** (16/04/97) stressing the multimedia aspects of the staging, and Lyn Gardner in **The Guardian** (26/04/97) asking whether a play having its own website was a gimmick? **The Sunday Times** (27/04/97) gleefully reported that magazine **ArtScene** had believed Sutherland when he had told them that Nintendo were going to be making a computer game based on the novel.

The designer was Robert Innes Hopkins won the Best Designer at the 1997 Barclay's Theatre Awards for his work that year. The lighting design was by Heather Carson who now often works with the RSC.

The show moved on to the Lyric in Hammersmith in September 1997 with further revisions and some changes to the cast. With Janine Wood sharing the Frank role with the returning Daniel Illsley. Charles Jarman provided a stage presence for Eric, but his phone calls were still provided by recordings.

2000 – De Wespenfabriek

De Wespenfabriek was performed at the Holland Festival in 2000 by the RO Theater Company. Premiering at the Theater Bellevue in Amsterdam it then toured the country. The work was adapted by Gerardjan Rijnders in conjunction with the director Guy Cassiers. In a similar way to the Sutherland version utilised audio and video recordings of actors, with the set, designed by Peter Missotten, made up of tangled cables with cameras, projectors and lights that reacted to the actor's voice.

Steven van Watermeulen played the lead role (although skimming through the Dutch language reviews, the character seems to have been renamed Tom). Joop Keesmaat played the Father and Peter Paul Muller appeared as Eric via video and audio, and some reviewers regarded van Watermeulen's performance as a solo one, a quasi-monologue. He won the 2001 best Dutch male actor award, the Louis d'Or, for this performance.

Karen Fricker reviewed the festival for **Variety** (10/07/00) and described van Watermeulen as "rigged out with tubes that allow water to occasionally flow down his arms; he wears two remote microphones pasted to his bald head." She concluded, "the Dutch audience responded to the performance with an admiring ovation, but it felt impossible to engage with - purposely aloof and inaccessible, a display of expensive toys." Brian Parks in his review published in **Village Voice** (11/07/00) related how, "an actor appears three times--onstage, as projected video, and as his shadow playing against his video image. Vocal samples are caught live, then looped back under a character's dialogue. The cumulative effect was quite stunning."

2004 – One Man Show

In 2004/2005 a one-man version was in development through the Ransom Theatre Company's "WRITE NOW" project for new playwriting. John O'Brien was the writer involved along with director Karl Wallace. However, I have not been able to establish whether or not this production was actually staged for a paying audience.

2008 Revival

The Cumbernauld Theatre Company revival, in association with the Tron Theatre, has a new director, Ed Robson. Ed has been the artistic director at Cumbernauld since mid 2006, and colleague Nigel Dunn is listed as composer for the production which is in the early stages of planning with no casting information revealed yet, and rehearsals due to start in March.

2008 Performances

Tron Theatre, Glasgow
Thursday 17th April to Saturday 26th April
2008 (not Sun 20th / Mon 21st)
See: <http://www.tron.co.uk>

Macroberts Art Centre, Stirling
Tuesday 29th and Wednesday 30th April
See: <http://www.macrobert.org>

An Lanntair, Isle of Lewis
Sat 3rd May
See: <http://www.lanntair.com>

Regal Theatre, Bathgate
Thursday 15th May
See: <http://www.bathgateregal.org>

Ryan Centre, Stranraer
Friday 16th May
See: <http://www.stranraer.org/ryancentre>

Palace Theatre, Kilmarnock
Saturday 17th May

Cumbernauld Theatre
Monday 19th May to Wednesday 21st May
See: <http://www.cumbernauldtheatre.co.uk>

Dundee Rep Theatre
Thursday 22nd May to Saturday 24th May
See: <http://www.dundeerep.co.uk>

Byre Theatre, St Andrews – TBC
See: <http://www.byretheatre.com>

Eden Court, Inverness - TBC
See: <http://www.eden-court.co.uk>

Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh
Wednesday 4th June to Saturday 7th June
See: <http://www.traverse.co.uk>

Check with the theatres to confirm dates and times. The tour has its own website registered but it is not yet up and running (Feb 2008).
See: <http://www.waspfactorytour.co.uk>

Mecon X

A report by your editor

Mecon is the annual convention organised by the Queens University, Belfast, Science Fiction and Fantasy Society.

The first time I flew into Belfast was before the Good Friday Agreement and I was visiting a friend from university who lived in Cookstown. I had been picked out for special questioning at Luton, and then when we were driving out of the airport we were stopped at an army checkpoint and they made me get out of the car and checked my luggage. My friend was fuming as having lived for twenty-five years in the province this was the first time she had been made to get out of a car at a checkpoint. This sort of thing happening when you are “flying whilst in possession of a beard” is something that you get used to. The second time I flew to Belfast it was September 12th 2001. That was not a good day to fly. My third flight to Northern Ireland for Mecon was unremarkable compared to the previous two.

I had taken an early flight so had time to take the open top bus tour round the fine looking city twice before heading the University for the convention opening ceremony. I met up with a couple of guys from the Iain Banks Forum and we formed ourselves into a team for the (what appears to be traditional) opening night quiz. Our poor showing may be down to the fact that the quizmaster had not been handed the Iain Banks round, and whilst questions about the other guests were scattered around different parts of the quiz, there were no questions on our specialist subject, although we found out later that there was a whole round on Iain that had not been given to the quizmaster and so didn't actually get read out. The free flowing Guinness might have had a detrimental impact on our higher brain functions, but I admit my knowledge of minor Dr Who characters was never there in the first place.

Saturday and the convention kicked into actual programming, although in quite a relaxed way. Iain's Guest of Honour speech brought the vast majority of the attendees together to hear the prologue to *Matter*,

followed by some questions and answers. Iain was on very good form, highly animated and very discursive in his answers. His demonstration of how an adult cannot sniff their own heel like a baby had to be seen to be believed.

A question about spelling the names of the characters he had just talked about saw Banks ponder the possibilities of writing a whole book using the phonetic alphabet or even Esperanto, before commenting on how it was a privilege to write in English as there were so many words to work with. Talking about what he would write after *Matter* he said that as he has a long run up to the next book he hopes to make it a complicated one – “vaguely *Bridge* like is the plan, but don't hold me to it”. He also dropped in that *Garbadale* had been optioned by most of the people who had done *The Crow Road*

There is a ten minute extract from the middle of the talk, where he talks about some of his very early writing, on YouTube, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2_4kbroke8

Being the relaxed convention where most guests and attendees spent a fair amount of time in the bar I managed to chat to Iain about a few things. A particularly interesting snippet about *Matter* that he revealed was that in his planning process he uses three letter acronyms to distinguish his major characters, and these in turn often inform their names. Hence the Desert Start Agent, abbreviated to DSA, eventually became Djan Seriy Anaplian. Her brother Ferbin otz Aelesh was originally known as the ‘Focus Of Attention’ and Oramen lin Blisk was the ‘One Left Behind’. *Matter* is essentially the story of these three siblings with one leaving, one staying and one returning.

Iain also appeared on the writing panel with C.E. Murphy and Alistair Reynolds. Asked about the mechanics of how they go about writing all the writers explained that their main computer for writing was not connected to the Internet as that would be too much of a distraction. Murphy went on to describe her writing chair which has half of a split keyboard on either arm. Iain professed to have chair envy.

A panel on the last day, Dead Authors Telling Tales, was hijacked by all the guests who, after a brief flirtation with democracy, eventually decided to ask the audience to ask them anything. Iain talked about his brush with fame when he appeared as an extra in Monty Python and the Holy Grail and exchanged hellos with John Cleese. Iain got to be a knight as he was tall and wore knitted armour. After Ian MacDonald was asked why he had written "I hate this book" in one of his own, the other authors were asked which of their works they might do this to. Banks answered that he would not disown any of his, but that *Canal Dreams* was the one he was least proud of and had the most trouble writing, during his talk the previous day he had described the politics as "wafer thin". Then after the question was flipped round to talk about favourites he responded *The Bridge*. As the conversation diverted into their own personal heroes and who to invite to a dinner party Iain expressed his admiration in meeting Buzz Aldrin and how it must have sent him up a few levels in the 'six degrees of separation game'.

Waterstone's in Belfast had arranged for Iain to do a signing in the early afternoon the day after the convention, and I decided to wander from my hotel to there to see the reaction of the locals. I ambled from my hotel through Belfast and happened upon an Oxfam shop with a nice looking book section so passed some time there and was amazed to find a pair of Banks proofs, *The Business* and *A Song of Stone*, along with another from Ken MacLeod. I purchased the trio and headed off to signing with renewed vigour as I actually had something for Iain to sign.

Unfortunately I had now accumulated, along with the books purchased at Mecon, more than would fit in my single bag, which would be an issue with the airline. Not wanting to post signed books, I therefore entrusted my dirty clothes to the Royal Mail as they least valuable (to me) of the possessions I had with me.

An interview undertaken at Mecon and part of Iain's Guest of Honour speech are available as podcasts from: <http://www.phazecast.com/>

Matter

Starting with a timeline of the book's development and then moving onto the reviews that the book has received.

Timeline

25/02/07 at his AyeWrite appearance in Glasgow Banks said that he was writing the book and that this was because he had been late with the previous one. He had bought himself a new laptop to write it whilst he was on the road. He reported that he had completed about 108,000 words and this was about halfway through. Banks promised: "a Culture agent", "a lippy drone", that it was "set on a shell-world", there would be "murder and mayhem", and overall it would have an "Elizabethan tragedy feel". At this point there was still no decision on the title and Banks mentioned it might be called *The Integrity of Objects* or *The Expeditionary* or *Matter*. These eventually turn up in the book as titles of two of the three sub-sections.

07/04/07 Gary Lloyd, collaborator on the *Espedair Street* album project, reported that Iain had written about 160,000 words of the book.

25/04/07 First draft submitted.

28/04/07 at alt.fiction 2007 in Derby Iain read the prologue (part of this can be found online at YouTube), and said he had submitted it that Wednesday.

25/05/07 In an interview published in The Guardian Banks is quoted as saying, "it's 204,000 words long and the last 4,000 consist of appendices and glossaries. It's so complicated that even in its complexity it's complex."

--/07/07 The Little, Brown website is updated with the book synopsis, which then makes its way onto bookshop sites and blogs.

03/08/07 Second draft submitted. Iain then drove in his new Toyota Yaris to get the ferry to go to Belfast for the Mecon X Convention where he was guest of honour. Chatting at the convention he revealed the editing process knocked about 10% off the original draft, and the book was now around 183,000 words.

04/08/07 Mecon X Guest of Honour speech by Banks. Iain reads the prologue again to an SF audience, but at his other book festival appearances this year he reads from *Garbadale*.

08/08/07 An image of the cover (illustrated by Debra Lill) was added to the Little, Brown website entry for the book.

09/08/07 Tim Holman blogs about the cover on the Orbit website, and reveals that the illustrator was Debra Lill. He also revealed half a dozen ship names from the book.

13/11/07 A post from Andrew McKie, a reviewer for the **Telegraph**, in his blog boasts that he is in possession of a copy of the proof. It reads simply: "Hello, Iain M Banks fans! I'm reading *Matter*. Ha!" He also posts a message in a Banks related Facebook group.

--/11/07 Proofs appearing on eBay are suddenly disappearing. Hachette have a policy of asking the auction site to remove them.

19/11/07 Lev Grossman, of **Time** magazine, blogs about enjoying *Matter* whilst staying in Venice.

28/11/07 A number of proofs are evident in the audience for a BSFA meeting featuring an interview with Iain M. Banks.

30/12/07 Andromeda Spaceways publishes a review on its Internet site.

03/01/08 Review on Big Dumb Object blog.

08/01/08 Orbit begin to wind up their publicity machine. A blog entry asks UK and US readers to email in to win an advance copy of the book.

14/01/08 Interzone #214 published with an interview of Banks by Paul Raven and a full-page back cover advert for *Matter*.

15/01/08 The Orbit blog puts the text of the prologue of the book online.

20/01/08 The first newspaper review appears in **Scotland on Sunday**.

22/01/08 The "Iain M. Banks UK Tour Details" are posted on the Orbit blog.

24/01/08 A book distributor's website reported that they had received their copies. Online retailers such as Play.com and Amazon report that the book is in stock and some bloggers / forum users report getting shipping notification emails.

26/01/08 Copies prominently on the shelves in Borders in Cambridge.

late/01/08 A proof finally reaches completion on eBay without being removed, presumably now that the first editions are in the wild the publisher's are not chasing these down as they did before Christmas.

30/01/08 *Matter* reaches #11 on the Amazon books bestseller list. This covers all types of books and is updated hourly. The book had risen to #8 by 03/02/08 when this entry was added. It was #1 in the Fantasy list.

31/01/08 The Official UK publication date? See the entry for 07/02/08.

01/02/08 The Orbit blog announces the available of a pre-release download of the unabridged audiobook (weighing in just under 18 hours) on iTunes UK, with a note saying the abridged CD version will be available from the 7th. The unabridged download was also available via audible.co.uk.

07/02/08 The Official UK publication date? This date was listed by the publishers and online booksellers as the publication date for a long time, and the advertisements and blurb on the proof said it would be published in February, but after the fact even the Little Brown website now lists 31/01/08 as the publication date, but it was in the shops a week before then anyway.

13/02/08 The author website run by Banks's publishers is re-launched with a new URL: <http://www.iainbanks.net>

17/02/08 The **Sunday Express** has *Matter* at #2 on the hardback bestseller list compiled for them by Waterstone's. It is behind John Grisholm's *The Appeal*, but ahead of *Jamie at Home*.

25-27/02/08 The *Matter* UK tour.

27/02/08 The Official US publication date, although some bloggers reported receiving their copies on the 19th.

Reviews

Reviews were mostly very positive with the odd dissenting view, and reviewers managing to identify a wide variety of themes and influences – as usual with Banks spotting the real story is part of the game.

Lisa Tuttle reviewed the book in **The Times** (01/02/08). Her review set the background of Banks as a writer of Space Opera and Utopias, before going on to précis the plot and finishing with a paragraph and a half of commentary/criticism. She enjoyed that the usual Culture ingredients were included, but opined that “some of the complexity and the games with narrative structure that distinguished earlier books” is missing, before her closing comment, “the conclusion is unexpectedly savage, emotionally powerful, and impossible to forget.”

SFX Magazine via David Bradley gave the book its top rating. He noted that “Culture’s elite status in the universe feels somewhat diminished: the book teems with alien civilisations at different levels of advancement.” He found the book “accessible and packed with adventure, set in a vast, beautifully-realised environment with appealing characters. There’s a stack of world-building information to take in – a couple of infodumps do detract somewhat from the story’s progress.”

In the **Financial Times** (16/02/08), James Lovegrove said, “Banks’s SF is superior stuff, free of the self-important solemnity that makes most space opera so stodgy. You’re never far from a scene of raucous intoxicant abuse or a gritty one-liner, here with the added thrill of cool future-tech weaponry, not to mention sentient spaceships with silly names.”

Francis Spufford indulged his inner 14-year-old in **The Evening Standard** (11/02/08) and describes Banks as, “up there with the pulpmeisters of SF’s early decades in his appetite for explosions, galactic empires, space fleets, ray guns and talking squid.” Although later suggesting that “*Matter* ought to be one of his best, and it isn’t, quite, because he appears to have been waylaid by pulpy possibility.”

Audiobook

The audiobook for *Matter* is coming in two versions. The physical version on 5 CDs is a less than a third of the length of the eighteen hours of the download. Hachette Audio made this decision in order to keep the prices down, judging that a full release (probably filling up 16 CDs) would be too expensive for many, and that those wanting an unabridged version would be happy to go the download route.

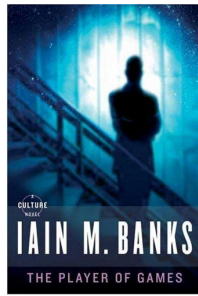
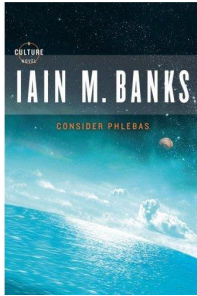
The recording sessions were timetabled for early December with the reader being Toby Longworth. Toby recently played the role of the Electric Monk in the BBC Radio dramatisation of *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency* and in my other life as a writer on Douglas Adams I was fortunate enough to be invited to the studio to attend some of the recording sessions. I have to admit that I didn’t actually see much of Toby. As his voice was electronically treated for the part (if you listen carefully over the series the treatment reduces at the character learns English better) he was stuck away in a little booth to keep his voice separate from those of the other actors. He demonstrated his vocal dexterity by also performing the parts of the different station announcers at either end of a train journey.

Toby’s work on *Matter* illustrates his skills to distinguish between the many human and alien characters in the book. Some of the voices veer towards caricature, at times the interaction between Ferbin and his servant was a played a little too comically, and I kept expecting Choubris Hulse to say “Yes M’Lady” to his foppish master. Listening to an audiobook after reading it you feel an emphasis on different plot elements to the ones that you originally picked up on. It may be that the author intended this pair to be regarded as the Shakespearian type comedy duo which I feel they come over as in the reading. Longworth wraps his tongue round the alien names and technology, and perhaps drawing on his experience as the Electric Monk, is spot on as a sarcastic Culture drone.

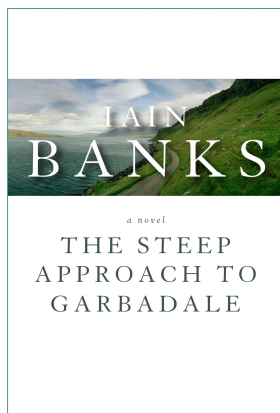
I prefer the unabridged edition. Amongst its cuts, the abridgement disposes of the framing prologue and epilogue to its detriment.

Banks Backlist

As well as *Matter* being published in the US less than three weeks after it's UK publication Orbit are starting on the author's backlist. Trade paperbacks of *Consider Phlebas* and *The Player of Games* are being published with covers based on the new UK ones.



Use of Weapons follows this pair on July 28th. The US publishers of *Garbadale*, MacAdam Cage have listed an edition of *The Crow Road* for hardback publication for sometime in August. The cover of their version of *Garbadale* was produced in house by art director Dorothy Smith who will be working on *The Crow Road* cover in due course.



In the UK we have the paperback edition of *Garbadale* to look forward to, but the big news is an unabridged audiobook of *The Wasp Factory* from Hachette Audio. Read by Peter Kenny who narrated the *Garbadale* release this was initially expected before Christmas but was moved into the New Year in order to benefit from the publicity that the publication of *Matter* will have created. Both these items are listed for Thursday 6th March. I hope the audiobook is followed by further unabridged readings of the Banks backlist.

The Russian translation rights to *Garbadale* have been sold to Eksmo Publishers.

Banks Live

Events known at time of going to press

18:00 Sunday 9th March

AyeWrite, Glasgow Book Festival

Appearance with Ken MacLeod

19:30 Sunday 9th March

Iain is listed amongst the readers at an event called 'From Saturn to Glasgow: a celebration of Edwin Morgan'.

See: <http://www.ayewrite.com/>

20:00 Monday 12th May

Lincoln Book Festival

Interview by his old editor and friend John Jarrold, to be followed by a Q&A session.

See: <http://www.lincolnbookfestival.co.uk/>

Saturday 9th - Monday 25th August

Edinburgh Book Festival

Iain is pretty much a fixture so can be expected to make an appearance, but the programme will be published in June.

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

Saturday 6th / Sunday 7th September

Islay Book Festival

Iain Banks opens the renamed Port Ellen festival, with Iain M. Banks making an appearance the next day.

See: <http://www.portellenbookfestival.co.uk/>

Saturday 11th / Sunday 12th October

NewCon4, The Fishmarket, Northampton

Iain is Guest of Honour along with Ken MacLeod and Storm Constantine, with Paul Cornell also a guest. If you book before March 25th you will qualify for a £10 discount with a further discount for BSFA members. See: <http://www.newcon4.com>

Further book festival appearances can be expected in the second half of 2008. Details of these when they become public knowledge will be added to **The Banksoniain** Calendar available from the link on our website.

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

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