



## The Bridge

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## **The Bridge** Iain Banks

A darkly brilliant novel of self-discovery the cutting edge of experimental fiction. It leads from nowhere to nowhere, the mysterious world-spanning structure on which everyone seems to live. Rescued from the sea, devoid of personality or memory, all John Orr knows is the Bridge, his persistent dreams of war, and his desire for Chief Engineer Arrol's provocative daughter, Abberlaine.

## **The Bridge Details**

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Author : Iain Banks

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## From Reader Review The Bridge for online ebook

### **Manny says**

Banks apparently thinks this is his best novel, and I agree. A very fine interleaving of dream and reality, without making the connections overly clear. Kafka meets the Wizard of Oz.

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### **Shawn Davies says**

This is the one that the literary circles like to applaud, the one that Melvyn Bragg spent half of a South Bank Show special talking about, at the expense of Iain M Banks obviously! Yet this is the book which perhaps melds the two Iains together the best, the contemporary chronicler of Scotland and the foibles and machinations of modern protagonists from Complicity to the Crowd Road, with the wild imagination and sex and gore and shock of the Culture novels.

Here is a mans life, lived and loved in modern Scotland, building a career, buying cars, history passing and times changing and commentary abounds. But then there is the juxtaposition, the Bridge, the fantasy world of the comma patient, a commentary on a life, a journey, a battle of the Id and Ego, dead ends, red herrings, strangeness, false hopes and allusions and illusions.

It is an absolute delight to read Iain Banks prose, whether in the real world, or the endlessly inventive and perplexing world of the bridge.

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### **Abailart says**

I love bridges, I spent much of my childhood designing them and building models. I love pictures and photographs of, and books about bridges, and I love the engineering aspects. I sit on bridges, under bridges, and looking at bridges, and feel complete. I love the Forth Bridge in Scotland, from when I first saw it on The 39 Steps (Hitchcock) to when my Dad took me up there when I was 10. And I like Iain Banks who was brought up on the Fife side of the Forth Bridge. So when I read this knockout fantasy set within the girders of the Forth Bridge, a Bridge become a universe, you will not wonder why I give it 5 stars. There is a neat parable called he Bridge by Kafka, too. And Annie Lennox has something to do with it.

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### **Deborah says**

Reading this book is a difficult but worthy enterprise. In many ways this has to be Banks' best non-SF effort though there are elements of his SF writing here. It's set in two planes of existence and that's very hard to get off the ground but the rich detail, the worrying quality of the story and indeed the worries of the main character himself become our own. Good. Trippy. And the Forth Rail Bridge is such a rocking piece of architecture it deserved this immortalization in fiction.

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## Daniel says

This review contains a mild spoiler. I don't know if you can call it a spoiler, because the Amazon book description as well as the Publishers Weekly review both give it away. I think that's a crying shame, although it's not really a spoiler that would take a lot of brain cells to figure out on your own. Anyway, I wouldn't mention it in my review if it weren't a key reason why I disliked the novel. Are you ready? Here it is:

It's all a dream.

Sigh. This book was written 25 years ago, but even then the "it was all a dream" scenario wasn't really all that fresh or interesting, and it takes a heckuva lot of talent to pull it off without getting readers to feel like they've wasted their time. After all, absolutely anything can happen in dreams, and so it's never really a surprise when anything does. Say goodbye to plot, conflict, tension, drama, or any of the other structural bits and pieces that authors use to guide their storytelling. The most you can do with "it was all a dream" is connect it in some way to reality and hope that the bridge is meaningful or profound in some way.

The metaphor of the bridge is a pretty hefty one here. Suffering from amnesia, our narrator is fished from the waters around a bridge. This is no ordinary bridge. It's so large that it seems to have no beginning or ending, and an entire civilization lives among its beams and girders. This is, in fact, a really cool idea and worth exploring. Meanwhile, our narrator is asked by his therapist to provide him with examples of his nightly dreams. Since he doesn't remember his dreams, he makes them up. At first. This is also a pretty interesting concept, and the narrator's dreams -- both real and fake -- are pretty fascinating stuff.

But it's really all just a fictional gumbo. The narrative voice slips and slides for no reason other than to increase the disorienting effect of the dreamscape. Different stories -- including one about a warrior and his smart-mouthed familiar -- gain and lose prominence as the book goes on. The narrator, inexplicably, makes it off of the bridge and into a city that appears to be at war. Then he comes back. Then there's a desert. Back and forth. Up and down. There's no consistency to any of it, but that's because it's a dream, you see.

The thing is, no one likes to be told about your dreams. It doesn't matter how cool your dream is to you, or even what cool ideas there are in it, if you start to explain your dream to someone and it lasts longer than a minute, they'll start getting that glazed look in their eyes. I felt the exact same way about this book. Once it became apparent that this was all just some kind of coma-dream, it developed a hollow, very aimless feeling, and I ended up wishing it were over sooner.

Banks does include a description of the narrator's life when he was awake, and it's actually kind of impressive how well he conveys an entire life with such economy of language. You speed through his childhood and school years and well into his adulthood, marking his successes and failures and even the size of his bald spot. Much of his life centers around an unconventional relationship with a woman. But, even though it's nifty how slickly Banks condenses this man's personality and life into such a small space, the guy and his history aren't especially compelling. Even the kinda-sorta open relationship that he has feels just as hollow and aimless as the dream world he spends most of the book inhabiting. And no, it's pretty clear that that isn't the point of the book.

While it was probably a ton of fun to write and while there are elements here and there that are imaginative and stimulating, the whole experience is ultimately as unsatisfying as trying to remember the details of your

own dreams an hour after waking. It's ultimately unsuccessful, and you end up wondering why you're even bothering.

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### **Christine says**

This is a novel that makes the reader work - and it's worth it. I felt like I was using mental muscles that hadn't been exercised this hard in some time, in an effort to keep hold of the multiple stories-within-stories-within-stories - and just as importantly to note the parallels and joins and circularities, some of which come maybe 200 pages apart. I suspect the word "virtuosity" gets used a lot in connection with The Bridge, as it feels like a high-wire juggling act for the author as well, like he's not entirely sure that it will all come together at the end. (A thought occurs as I find myself trying to avoid using the same metaphors for author and reader and character - perhaps this desperate grasping as things slip through the mind's fingers is supposed to mimic the character's struggle for mental cohesion and identity. a bit book-clubbish, but nevertheless plausible).

The idea of the story is given away in the blurb and so it's not spoilering to say that this takes place entirely within the brain of a man lying in a coma after a car crash.

It probably *is* spoilering to say that the book jumps among "Real" world memories, the Bridge World that the character finds himself in as an amnesiac immediately after, and stories and dreams of the character (christened "John Orr") in the Bridge World, who is however *also* maybe a character (or merged characters) from within one in particular of those stories - the one involving a Glaswegian barbarian in the swords-and-sorcery vein.

(There are probably more moebius connections I'm missing after just finishing, too - probably a 24-hours-later check-in will reveal more if I'm so minded).

Some other reviews seem to have disliked the barbarian sections because they are partly written in dialect. Maybe because I've been a fan of Glaswegian dialect approximations since reading the McAuslan books by George MacDonald Fraser, and maybe it's because I was reading in my own room rather than in public and could do them (quietly) out loud to myself, but for me these were possibly the funnest bits, and ones that in their relatively cheerful lack of introspection provide a necessary relief from the rest of the "realities".

I'm not going to go into detail for the rest of the plot, partly because it feels like it would be better with some sort of flow diagram, partly because I only just finished and am still processing it - but I will say that amongst all of the virtuoso structure-y stuff, there's a really sweet story about love and having another person as part of your life, even in an unconventional way.

### Stray Thoughts

- It is a loss to the world that Banks died so soon.

- I wonder if Iain Banks saw the *Life on Mars* TV show, and what he thought? Certainly it's hard to read this without thinking of that show (the UK original not the US remake), which also features a man in a coma in a dreamworld, and it did have some of the same stuff happening, like the "using TV set to show 'reality'" trope. Sometimes that was helpful in reading, sometimes it just added to the confusion.

- I really want to go to see the Forth Bridge in reality, now.

- Man, there's a lot of specifics about cars and car types! Like, a lot a lot. It's clear they're meant to signify something about the character (in "real world") and where he's at in his life, but don't know enough about cars from the 1980s and their classiness/expense to decode it so just glossed over them. Plus, I'm not a guy and the car as possession/political symbol is clearly very important to the main character (see: cause of coma - car crash) in a way that seems terribly male. Then again, there's so many hyperspecific references here (not just cars but music, sword-and-sorcery fantasy, political protests, poetry, clothing ...), and some are so grounded in time and place of Scotland in the 1970s to 1980s, that I doubt any reader could be well-versed in all of them. More to the point, Banks is deliberate enough as an author deliberately demanding a lot from the reader, that I have faith that he's undoubtedly considered that and factored a safe amount of signifier redundancy into the system (another satisfying metaphorical parallel between author and the character - an engineer), so I don't feel I've missed all that much that matters.

### Overall

Overall this is an amazing romance-fantasy-sci-fi-war-literary novel. One of the other reviews I skimmed said Banks (presumably without the "M.") considered this his top novel, and while I haven't read enough to agree or disagree, I can certainly see why he'd be damn proud of it. The Bridge is almost superfluously difficult and intricate: Banks is playing with structure in a way that works for the book, but also to show off and to challenge. I think this book fits the literal, old definition of a "masterpiece": Banks is a craftsman demonstrating the top limits of his skill and the sure control of his tools, to show the other experts(authors? critics?) that he's worthy of membership in the Guild - even though it's likely that he could make a decent living never doing anything near so involved, and half the paying customers won't even appreciate it!

That makes it sound like I don't think it's good to read, and that's not true. It's good to read in part, though, *because* it's difficult. Banks could - and this is brazenly clear, a defiant "Are you hard enough jimmy?" to the reader - have written a more straightforward book about a mental landscape of a man in a coma, one that tended either more fantasy, or more literary-modern, and that fit a bit more in the easy order of layering and "oh, that bit is related to that event" revelation. He didn't. The complexity of the book is a challenge but it's also a gift, because it makes you slow down to process (same with the dialect maybe), and that gives space to think in unfamiliar ways about the big ideas going on here - reality, dreams (both sleeping and aspiring), faith and love, identity as minds and body and dreams change and are touched by others.

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### **Ian says**

A fantastic experience that's clearly a dream yet the story is reminiscent of everything we all have to deal with in the real world every day.

A dream that's clearly the real world yet the story is too lovely to be real, and too painful not to be.

Dreams that are dreams within dreams that may hold meaning but it's hidden from me.

Read it. You may regret it. But you won't forget it.

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## Scott says

Iain Banks was a genius and *The Bridge* is one of his greatest works. Few would disagree with the first statement, but some might disagree with the last.

Why? Because this novel utilizes a pretty cheesy central plot device – that the events occurring are the dreams of a man in a coma.

If this puts you off I understand - usually any novel using the 'It was all a dream' premise sounds as appealing to me as *Days of our Lives* in book form - but trust me: this novel is worth your time. If you can look past this cliched premise you will find yourself immersed in one of the best books I've read in the last decade.

If you've read any Banks you'll know that he was as comfortable with literary fiction as he was with Science Fiction, writing many books in both genres during his career. *The Bridge* falls into the litfic section of his output, but contains enough weird and speculative elements to appeal to those (like me) whose tastes tend towards genre.

The story is split three ways.

The first character, Alex, wakes on a bridge. However, this is no ordinary bridge. This bridge is a world, a vast, many-levelled structure that spans a seemingly endless sea, stretching off into infinity in either direction, an entire civilization existing within its steel stanchions and concrete buttresses.

Alex lives in this strange world, unsure how he came to be there exploring his new home and meeting with a psychiatrist to discuss his disturbing dreams (Dreams within a dream). In particular he is enduring a series of sometimes hilarious, sometimes horrifying nightmares where he is making his way across a strange and magical world as The Barbarian- a sword-swinging Scottish-brogue wielding warrior who is the second major character in the narrative.

While Alex explores his own mind and his environs we also follow the life of a young man, James Orr, who is making his way in our world (There are some parallels with Banks' character Adrian Cubbish in *Transition*, although Adrian is a bit more of a chancer than James).

James finds success, with all its trappings, but finds his wealthy life empty. Throughout his rise to success and ennui the common thread in his life is his love for a woman named Andrea Crammond, whom he reluctantly has to share with her other lover, a distant Frenchman.

Across these three narratives we begin to grasp what the bridge could be, explore the reasons Alex is there and discover the significance of both The Barbarian and the life that John Orr has lived.

What makes *The Bridge* so great is the inventiveness of Banks' narratives. Each of his books is a unique riot of imagination and *The Bridge* is funny, poignant and awe-inspiring, sometimes all at once on one page.

For those of us who love The Culture novels *The Bridge* also gives us a hint of Banks' famed space opera series years before *Consider Phlebas* was written, with hints of an interstellar civilization and advanced technologies sneaking into one of the narrative threads. If you're as obsessed with The Culture as I am this glimpse of the seed that would grow into ten of the best novels in SF is tasty indeed.

It's totally heady stuff, and I was shamelessly addicted, pawing over pages late at night, my eyes bleary with fatigue, ignoring my partner, my cat and any food unable to be eaten with one hand.

For some readers the founding premise of the novel may seem trite. For me however, the brilliance of the story and Banks's regular volcanic eruptions of narrative inventiveness massively overshadow the slightly clichéd premise beneath it all.

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### **Leo Robertson says**

What the hell this is so boring and aimless, and just not very well crafted either. I have to return to Murakami's rule from 1Q84: if the reader hasn't seen something before, you should take extra time to describe it.

And I knew it. I knew if I even caught a sniff of criticism of this book they would call it 'Kafka-esque', everyone's favourite shorthand for weird and depressing\*. People praise Murakami for his true understanding of Kafka, and I have to praise him too because I don't get Kafka, but I have a strong inkling for what someone is going to call Kafka-esque, which often only tells me that the critic is reminded of Kafka, and not necessarily that the writing has any qualities of Kafka. Incidentally, this also feels like the depths of Banks' understanding of Kafka. Kafka.

Okay, so this is a book about psychology and an in-depth exploration of our relationships, but first and foremost, it may come as a surprise that it's actually about a fucking bridge. And if you go 'I got in the lift, I went to the building' where is the lift? The building, in relation to the bridge? Alongside it? Does it occlude the passage along the bridge? Then your character goes beneath the bridge and starts cutting about\*\*. I didn't even know what the top of the bridge looked like! Now you're underneath it? What's there? I am given next to no tools to visualise this bridge, the buildings etc.

If you're going to build a weird world, well... build it. If you have a message about relationships, don't expect to wow me with psychoanalysis and literary quality before you have a plot, characters and- oh god!- a setting.

Go home literature, you're drunk.

\*I forgot Beckett, too. Was it weird and depressing? Yeah. Didyageddit? No. Beckett!

\*\*Scottish 'walking about'

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### **Nick Wellings says**

Hypnagogic, mesmerising, hallucinatory: the melding of the real with the vanished, the imaginary, the may-never-have-been. A bridge becomes the whole architectonic world of a mind, and vice versa. As experiment in stretching a formal conceit to an aesthetic project, Banks's saran-wrap of metal over narrative succeeds grandly.

In the Bridge, the usual Banksian tropes plonk into Being: the requisite names which suggest familiarity but which maintain an air of oddity serve only to estrange, to make the quasi-real unreal; the preoccupation with

war as fundus of the human heart, at root of all. Sappy love stories between people. Modern day Scotland. Amnesia as convenient vehicle to knit together and explain all the above.

Tightly written - or should I say welded, this is probably the Best "non M" Banks that Banks has done. For all its head-in-the-clouds freewheeling, the book doesn't lose its feet: the book is firmly undergirt by the monolithic structure of the bridge indeed, dominated in fact by it, and Bank's artistic enterprise succeeds because of it. Compelling and fun.

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## The Usual says

This isn't a review, it's a love letter. Sorry.

In the large and disparate family of Iain Banks novels this is the funny looking kid whom you're sure must be adopted. Yes, it has its daddy's eyes and a wicked grin, but it's... Different. It's not one of the truly creatively nasty ones (*The Wasp Factory*; *Complicity*). It's not one of the warm(ish)-hearted ones (*The Crow Road*; *Whit*; *The Quarry*). It's not one of the dark, bleak, mildly baffling ones (*Canal Dreams*; *A Song of Stone*), or a love story with complications (*Stonemouth*; *Dead Air*; *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*). It's not Banks-with-an-m, though a knife missile does put in an appearance at one point. It's something altogether stranger, and unmistakably Banks.

(Apologies to *Walking On Glass*, *The Business*, and *Transition*, I haven't forgotten you, honest. As to *Espedair Street*, well, we haven't yet been introduced. I look forward to making your acquaintance.)

Banks's other books are grounded more-or-less firmly in some kind of reality; this is not. *The Bridge* is an extended dream sequence...

STOP!

I know what you're going to say, and:

1/ That's not a spoiler, it's mentioned quite explicitly in the blurb.

2/ It's not some kind of wishy-washy, misty-eyed, hand-wavingly vague, delicately allusive, oh-look-at-me-I've-read-a-psychology-textbook dream sequence with lots of notional fog drifting about the place, and sudden and jarring transformations, but something much more solid and robust.

*The Bridge* is an extended dream sequence in which three main strands of narrative reflect and inform one another. It has the lightness of *The Business* (see, I told you I hadn't forgotten you), and a much larger dose of verbal dexterity. It is, to be frank, very, very funny with serious undercurrents. It's a puzzle-box, and one of the delights is unpacking it for yourself.

Now, why might you not enjoy it?

Well, and this made my heart sink when I encountered it, but one of the strands is written in the kind of bizarre phonetic spelling that stopped me from reading *Feersum Enjinn*. I got used to it. Do not skip these sections, they are genuinely hilarious. I wonder if this is where Pratchett got the Feegles from.

There is the whole dream thing to contend with, but I think I've covered that. It's not as if there's that much gratuitous weirdness.

There's a fair bit of sex, so if you're one of Bertie Wooster's aunts... Well, probably just Aunt Agatha, Aunt Dahlia would take it in her stride, don't you think? Probably has done in her time... You might want to look away. Mind you, if you have a problem with sex you'll probably want to steer clear of Banks altogether.

There's the fact that it's not pure fantasy: one of the strands, and hence about a third of the book, is memory, and set in 60s-80s Scotland (roughly). In fact it's not pure anything, which is perfectly fine by me, but may bother you.

Oh, and there's the possibility that you may be expecting something deep and chin-strokingly serious, in which case you won't like the surface glitter... did I mention that it's really very funny? I did? Oh good. That and that if you are the kind of person who drives themselves mad trying to figure out what each and every reference means then you'll need a padded cell by the end. It might even be worth it.

This leaves me with the ticklish problem of the K-word and, slightly less contentiously, the matter of the G-word. There are, in the bridge section itself, traces of Kafka, and shades of Gormenghast. Both are powerful spices used sparingly, and I doubt I'd have spotted it if I hadn't read Walking On Glass, but they are there. Don't expect heavy and paranoid.

Just to complete this game of Iain Banks bingo, and with due apologies to anyone on the wrong side of the Atlantic, where Transition is Banks-with-an-m, there may be a touch here of the conflict between realism and solipsism - don't ask me about that, I'm no philosopher.

Bingo!

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### **Oscar says**

Con Banks se cumple una máxima: nunca escribe dos veces la misma historia. Y esto no es nada sencillo, ya que en un momento u otro todos los escritores caen en el autoplagio.

La historia es apasionante. John Orr, nuestro protagonista, vive en una ciudad que no es tal. Se trata de un puente de unas dimensiones enormes en el que hay trenes, tranvías, ciudades, aviones que sobrevuelan el puente sin razón aparente, dirigibles... y todo dentro del puente. John sufre amnesia y visita periódicamente la consulta de un doctor al que le cuenta sus sueños como terapia, sueños que son importantes para la historia ya que son otro protagonista más. Pero John está intrigado por este puente, pregunta y pregunta pero nadie sabe o quiere responderle. Intenta buscar la Biblioteca para obtener respuestas, pero parece que nadie sabe donde se encuentra. Parece que John se encuentra perdido, hasta que conoce a una joven... Y es que esta es una historia de amor.

Banks escribe muy bien y nunca decepciona, sabe narrar y sorprender con cada uno de sus libros. Es una pena que únicamente sea conocido por los amantes de la ciencia ficción y la fantasía.

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### **Alan says**

"Just one more thing." I nod at the bodies littering the ground like fallen leaves. "What happened here? What happened to all these people?"

He shrugs. "They didn't listen to their dreams," he says, then turns back to his task.  
—pp.362-363

Like skywriting in Braille... the late Iain Banks' early novel *The Bridge* is hard to get a grip on. The comparisons that spring to my mind are mostly cinematic... think David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, or perhaps Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder*.

Feverish and multilayered, *The Bridge* is a challenging work, not easy to appreciate, or to synopsize. A man lies in a coma after a car crash in Scotland; an amnesiac tries to fit into the linear society he finds living on an apparently-endless bridge; a barbarian warrior battles sorcery while ridden by a magical familiar. This is Banks without the M., the initialless persona he used for his mimetic fiction, but the veil between fantasy and realism here is very thin. *Most* of *The Bridge* appears to be fabulation, in fact—the great Bridge itself is a setting worthy of China Miéville, and there are swathes of a swashbuckling sword-and-sorcery tale told in the barbarian's near-impenetrable dialect. It seems likely from the beginning that all of these narrators are the same person, but if so which one is the *real* man, and which ones the butterflies merely dreaming that they are men?

And did it really take me more than 300 pages to remember that "bridge" has more than one meaning?

"No annihilation without representation,"  
—Stewart, p.330

*The Bridge* seemed steeped in the UK's politics of the 1980s, and in that way more akin to fellow Scots author Alasdair Gray's work than other Banks novels. Elsewhere in his conversation with Stewart, for example, our narrator speculates on whether Scotland could ever have become an empire the way Rome did. His conclusion is that by the time the Scots became civilized themselves, they'd missed their chance—they were already too late to become world civilizers.

She laughed, shook her head. "Well, love is blind," she said.  
"So they tell us," he sighed. "Can't see it myself."  
—p.278

Despite its bizarre trappings, exotic digressions and flights of outright fancy, though, *The Bridge* seems to me at its heart to convey a simple message, one that's utterly mundane: that although love may be blind, it's also strong—it'll find a way to express itself even though the rest of the world may have gone mad.

Ach, mebbe I've just gone a bit daft arter a hunnerd-and-fourty years wi'this wee bugger whisperin' on me shoulder...

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### Patrick says

When I first read *The Bridge* in my late teens, it had a huge impact on me. I'd never really read anything quite like it before: the blending of social realism and the science-fiction/fantasy world of '*The Bridge*' itself. Returning to it nearly twenty years later, I found it an enjoyable enough read, but couldn't help noticing its flaws. It isn't either quite as original or as clever as I had remembered it.

At the risk of a very minor spoiler (I think it's reasonably apparent to anyone who reads the first page properly), the book tells two stories: One, the story of John Orr, a man who washes up with no idea who he is or how he got there, at the foot of a quite surreal civilisation living on a phantasmagorically huge bridge. The other, the story of an un-named man (though I have read that you can work out that he's called Alex Lennox from the diagrams of the Bridge in the book and his surname, at least, is corroborated by a reference to the lead-singer of the Eurythmics) from a working class Glaswegian background who arrives at Edinburgh University in the late 1960s, falls in love with the upper-class Andrea Cramond, has a rather unconventional menage-a-trois relationship with her over the following eighteen years, while building up a successful engineering firm, all the while feeling an underlying discomfort that he is somehow betraying his working class roots. The two characters are, of course, the same person. The 'Bridge' sections play out as he lies in a hospital bed in a coma, following a traffic accident. Part of the fun comes from spotting how elements of the fantasy world connect back to his own life story (the first time I read it, I remember reaching the end and immediately beginning again and getting rather more out of it second time around). The horseman he meets at the beginning of the novel is clearly meant to stand in for Andrea's other lover, Abberlaine Arrol, the woman he seduces on The Bridge, is an imperfect facsimile of Andrea, and in the sequences later in the book where he leaves the Bridge and goes out and finds himself in a war-torn wasteland beyond, there appears to be a kind of metaphor for the way that his adult life began to go off the rails.

I don't know if I'm unusual in having a number of long-running narrative fictions floating about in my head (some of which I have been toying with since I was twelve years old), worlds I can easily enough float into when on a long train journey, or even just walking home from work, but reading this, I couldn't help thinking that it was in part about how what we imagine reflects back on our own life stories. John Orr's world can't help but be constructed from the fragments of Alex Lennox's life. Even when he's imagining living on the vast science-fiction world of the Bridge, that world still ends up echoing the real world from which he has been cut off.

So why wasn't I quite so impressed with it second time around? Well perhaps in part it's just that I've since realised it's not nearly as original as I thought at the time. Having since read Haruki Murakami, for example, I realise that there are others who can meld the real and the fantastical and, in some ways, do so to more interesting effect. And I don't know quite how I ploughed through the awful (though thankfully short) phonetic-Scots sections about a barbarian 'swordsman' and his familiar which didn't feel like they belonged in the same book. While the book does a very good job of portraying its central character, I couldn't help thinking that just about everyone else seemed very sketchily drawn. I never really understood what it was that drew him to Andrea, for example, because I never really got much of a sense of who Andrea actually was. And there were times when some of 'The Bridge' sequences felt like reading accounts of other peoples' dreams.

But I don't want to sound too negative. If the book doesn't mean quite so much to me at 36 as it did at 18, perhaps the story of a man arriving in Edinburgh at 18 was always going to appeal to me more than now. There's much to recommend in it: there's a lyricism to his description of Lennox's early years, and there are many great one liners – I particularly liked Lennox's drunken rant about the 1984 US Presidential election which he ends by saying "Why don't I get a vote?", to which his friend replies "No annihilation without representation, eh?" There are Easter-eggs (for want of a better term) for those who go looking for them too. Abberlaine Arrol's surname is a reference to the man who designed the Forth Rail Bridge, and the fact that the main character's name is Alex may just be an intertextual joke, as that was the name of Duncan Thaw's son in Lanark – a book which Iain Banks admitted was a strong influence. There are almost certainly many more that passed me by – I suspect the fraudulent Bridge psychiatrist Joyce might be a reference to James, but its relevance (as someone who's never so much as attempted Ulysses) passed me by. Worth revisiting, even if you can't stand in the same river twice.

[I'm not changing the 5 star rating. That's what I thought at the time. And I'd still give it four]

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### **Vít says**

Kniha, která vám místy p?ipomene Weis?v D?m o tisíci patrech, místy t?eba Mitchell?v Atlas mrak?. Jak se píše v anotaci, jen t?žko se dá její d?j vypráv?t. D?jových linek je hned n?kolik a to navzájem velmi odlišných, a? už prost?edím, postavami nebo dokonce jazykem. Tady musím složit poklonu Janu Kant?rkovi, po?ádn? si s tím pohrál :-) Trošku se zapotíte, až budete chtít zjistit co je realita, co halucinace a co sen, co je minulost a co sou?asnost, ale stojí to za to.

Za m? další vynikající v?c od Iaina Bankse a p?t hv?zd.

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### **Leagle says**

Considering my affection for Banks, it's remarkable how this book was about as enjoyable as a two-by-four across the forehead. I found it tedious and depressing.

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### **Sneha says**

I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone who expects to find meaning, connection or even a direct plot. Except for what is obvious, there is not much going for the book, plot-wise. Man goes into coma. Man must come out of it. Everything else, in between, is engaging, yet deeply un-meaningful. People who want to analyse and interpret the world of dreams might just have a field day with this book. But someone more astute to practical reasoning might just not be. There is nothing - I feel - deeply psychological about this book. There is a dream world that the protagonist is stuck in and he only half-way suspects that it is a dream. Then there are dreams within the dream. Imagination, inspiration, certain factors you wouldn't think would be possible to have in a dream. In that area, I found the book deeply satisfying. The complex meaninglessness of the dream world for me, is riveting. We each go on with our lives half-suspecting it is a dream and we go on with our dreams, half-suspecting it is life. Only when the luxury of slipping from one state to another, day in and day out, is taken away from us - as is the case with the man in the coma - do we begin to really examine reality. Or even strive for it.

Funny in unexpected ways, deeply imaginative in some of the dream within dream subplots, and quite satisfactory in the way the real life of our protagonist is depicted, Ian Bank's The Bridge is, if I dare say it, quite avant garde.

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### **Jack Lanigan says**

Well good gosh golly dang.

I don't know if I want to spoil too much about the story here so I'll get this out of the way and say that you should probably read this book. It's just so... weird. And wonderful. And kinda in that slow plodding kind of

book that I like but at the same time so full of little things and such a fast pace that it makes it hard not to like it. There's a bunch of different writing styles that come up at seemingly random that all manage to work their way into the plot and it's all just so wonderfully done.

I think that's about all I really want to say. Sure it might be a good idea to give more of a plot detail or talk about the prose or the dialogue but instead, I just think I won't. I can get why somebody might not like it, very easily so, but it dives right into the kinda shit that appeals to me, so check it out.

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### **Psychophant says**

This is, first and foremost, a love story. As a confessed Romantic, this is my favorite Iain M. Banks book. But it is much more than a love story, even if it is one that resonates very powerfully on me. It is also a vision on the wonders and depths of human fantasy, and how everyone of us holds the potential for wonder. In a way it is Whitman's quote given form:

*Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself,  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

And I love Bridges, and have a special spot for the two Firth of Forth bridges.

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### **Alan says**

I wasn't sure whether I enjoyed this book, or whether I got anything out of it. I had high expectations, because I usually enjoy Iain Banks' books and find them thought provoking.

This one is rather Kafkaesque, though without the overlong sentences of the real Kafka. This is not an action-packed book. In fact the whole plot can be described in about half a page of A4. It's rather a study of the relationship between dreams and reality, and about the fragility of cause and effect.

The central theme of the book is the discover by the narrator of his own memory, framed by his dream existence on the bridge of the title, which seems to be a metaphor for his life. His real existence is as a man in a coma after an accident. His dream life describes the process through which his memory returns and he decides whether or not return to reality in the glimmering light of gradually more significant revelations of his previous existence.

I'm glad I've read it, but I'm still not quite sure why. Just like Kafka then.

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