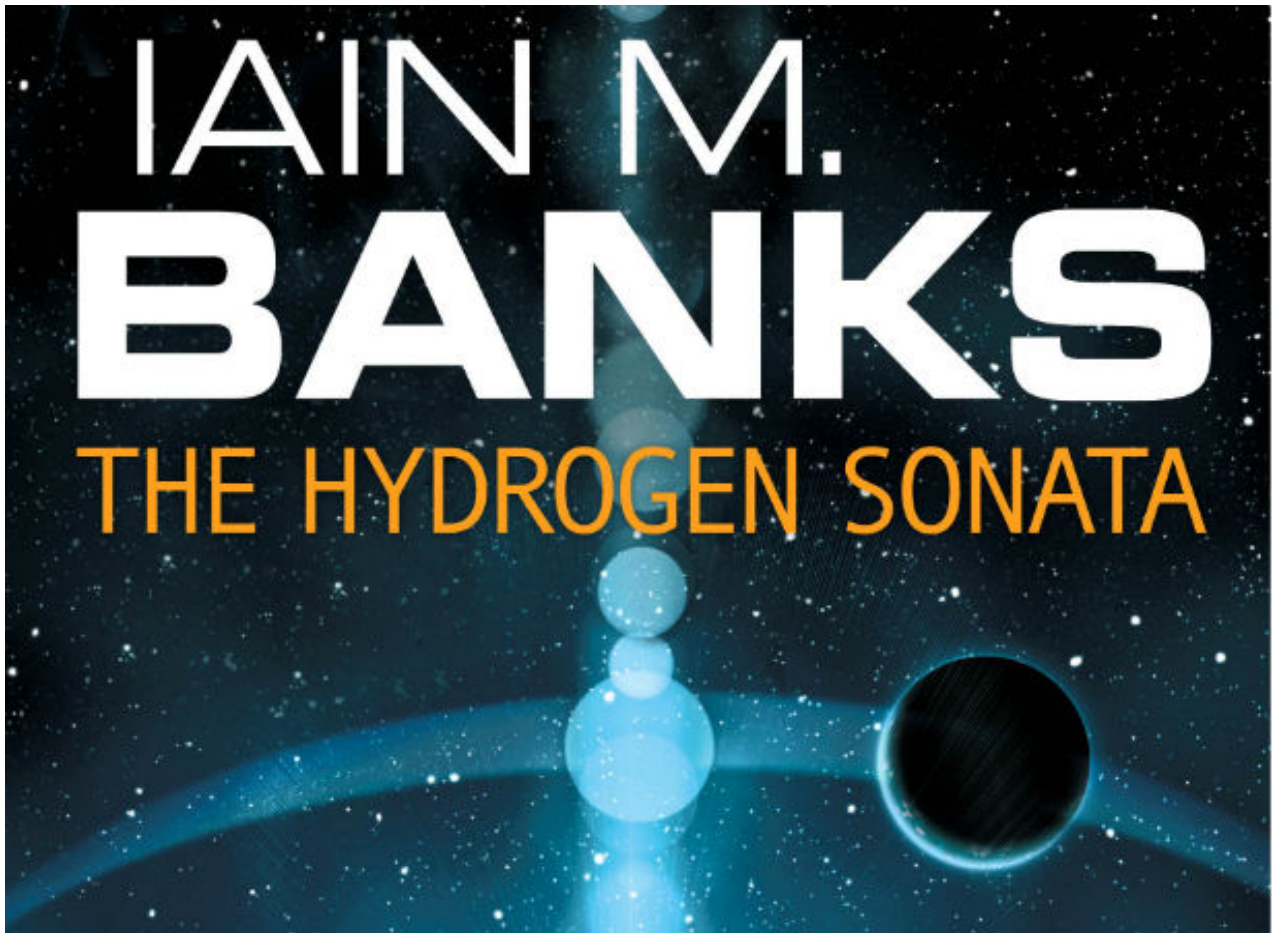


# Iain M Banks on the birth of the Culture and where it goes next

web.archive.org/web/20190729205317/https://www.scifinow.co.uk/interviews/iain-m-banks-on-the-birth-of-the-culture-series

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The Hydrogen Sonata by Iain M Banks is out 4 October 2012

We spoke to space opera icon Iain M Banks a few years ago, and to celebrate the release of his epic new book *The Hydrogen Sonata* – [pre-order it now from Amazon.co.uk for £10](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0099550000) – we’ve dug this classic chat out of the archives, and why not? To really appreciate where the Culture is going, you have to know where it has come from.

**When *Consider Phlebas* was released, it was commonly – and still is – seen as the book that repopularised space opera at a time when other subgenres were getting a lot of prominence. William Gibson released *Neuromancer* in 1984, for instance, and cyberpunk was on the rise. Would you agree with this assertion?**

Yeah, I suppose, it’s one of those things that only happens in hindsight. I just loved the scope of it – again, to quote Mr Aldiss, he came up with ‘white screen baroque space opera’, that was brilliant! And there were a lot of things that I was trying to do with it, to use a fairly epic format to demystify, to bring it down from heroes and princesses to the level of the grunts, that’s why the mercenary gang are not particularly good soldiers,

they're not impressive. I love space opera and I love the opportunity it gave me to work a huge canvas. I also felt that there was a moral high ground in space opera, and I wanted to reclaim it for the Left! I was fed up with reading these otherwise enjoyable books that ultimately turned out to be ultra-capitalist, or almost proto-fascist at times. I wasn't having this.

**Do you have any idea how long you plan to continue the Culture series for? Is there an end in sight?**

Not really! The honest answer is as long as I find new things to write about and make me excited about it. At the moment I still do, and the thing that I love about the Culture at the moment is that it's enormous fun for me, and as long as it stays fun for me you have to hope that it'll transmit to the reader. There's no built-in timescale, and one of the things that's been said about the Culture is that it does keep on going. One of the seductive problems and opportunities that science fiction offers you is that every single time, in every story, every novel, you can destroy the universe – it's in your power. But that kind of gets a bit boring, it's like watching *Doctor Who* – 'Oh no, we've got to save the world. Again.' And once you can do it, twice becomes... anyway. One of the things I wanted to do with the Culture is not destroy it, and part of the point of it is that it does just keep on going, it's kind of, deliberately surfing the breaking wave of technology and progress or whatever. So its continuance is kind of the point in a way, for the foreseeable future, I don't know, another couple of novels. Half a dozen!