

THE LEADER INTERVIEW

With John Buckley



● Author Darren O'Shaughnessy with John Buckley. The great thing about being a writer is that it's not really like being a popstar or an actor. People don't really know you, or what you look like (LL)



I ALWAYS knew I wanted to be a writer. I used to daydream about other stuff, but writing was always my number one goal

Darren Shan is still the man!

PALLASKENRY author Darren O'Shaughnessy's first novel, an adult fantasy called *ayumarca*, was published by Orion in 1998. The following year saw the first of his bestselling children's books series, *Cirque du Freak*, published by HarperCollins. The book introduces Darren Shan, an ordinary schoolboy who is plunged into the vampire world.

Book two of the Darren Shan Saga is titled *The Vampire's Assistant* and this is followed by *Tunnels of Blood*, *Vampire Mountain*, *Trials of Death*, and *The Vampire Prince*.

Book seven is called *Hunters of the Dusk* and his many loyal fans around the world are eagerly awaiting book eight *Allies of the Night*, which is due to be published in November.

Darren has also published *Hell's Horizon*, a tie-in with *ayumarca*, the second novel of *The City Series*, in 2000. Warner Brothers have taken a further 18-month 18m option on the first three Darren Shan novels, and a writer is now working on a script for a film of the books.

Which book did you find the most fun writing?

Probably *Tunnels of Blood*. The first two books were very much a learning process, finding out who the characters were and what sort of books I wanted to write. I really didn't know how they were going to turn out. So, the third book was the first time I sat down and knew the story to tell exactly and also to introduce the *Vampire Prince*. And you had Merlock running around the place and the romantic element. Yes, the third book was a lot of fun writing.

I understand when your first book was released in the United States it entered the top ten best sellers. Is this true?

Yes. It made it into the top ten

at number 10!

Is it hard to write for teenagers?

It is difficult, yes. But when I'm writing a book I don't think of the actual audience. I think of myself when I was about 12 or 13 and the sort of books I enjoyed reading. I write with that image in mind.

It is difficult finding the right tone because it's a very in-between time for teenagers. They still like books like mine but will also be reading a lot of adult books by the likes of Stephen King, so you want to get something that is easy enough for them to read but is also complicated enough to stimulate them.

How many books are you planning to write in the Darren Shan Saga?

I think there will be between 15 and 20 books. I don't know the exact number yet. I'm still finding that out.

How many have you written so far?

I've written the first 11 and I've started book 12. I'm about a third of the way through or maybe a little more.

When will book eight be released?

The official date is November, but it will probably be out in October. So from about mid-October it will probably be in the shops.

What do you do in your spare time?

I like to travel, to read and to watch lots of movies and I go to football games. I've just been to the World Cup finals. I followed the Irish team to Korea and I had a ticket up to the final, which, unfortunately, was not necessary. I was disappointed to have to fly home a day or two after their last game. It was wonderful. I'm going to Russia for Ireland's European

JOHN Buckley is 13 and will begin his secondary schooling at Colaiste Chiarain this September. The youngest son of Fiona and the late Niall St John Buckley, he is a big fan of the Darren Shan Saga and of author Darren O'Shaughnessy

qualifying game next month. How is the filming of books one and two working out?

What they are probably going to do if they make the movie is to combine books one, two and three, take some elements out of each book and mix them up. This will make it very different to the books probably, but will make it very action-packed with a lot going on.

A scriptwriter has just been hired and she is working on the script at the moment. There is still a long way to go and there's no guarantee that there will be a movie.

Now that you are known all over the world, do you think fame is going to your head?

You'll have to ask my personal assistant that. Not really, no. The great thing about being a writer is that it's not really like being a popstar or an actor. People don't really know you, or what you look like. The tabloids aren't really interested in you, you don't have the paparazzi following around.

It's very, very nice to be known but you still lead a very ordinary life. I can do things now that I couldn't do a couple of years ago, like travel around and go to the World Cup. But apart from things like that there hasn't really been that much difference. I still sit in my bedroom and tap away at the computer. That always brings me back to earth.

Did you like to write at school or did you just one day decide to write?

I always loved writing. Even when I was about six years old I loved telling stories and I loved

writing stories. I always knew I wanted to be a writer. I used to daydream about other stuff, but writing was always my number one goal.

How long have you been writing adult books?

I've been writing seriously since I was a teenager. When I was about 15 or 16 I started writing books and novels, so for about 14 or 15 years I've been banging away at it.

Are you still writing adult books?

Yes, I still try and write one a year. I didn't this year because at the moment the emphasis is on the children's books. They are doing really, really well and I've been working very hard on them. Maybe later on I can do more on the adult books.

I'm also doing more children's books apart from the Darren Shan books. But because the Darren Shan books are coming out so quickly it's not really possible at the moment to do anything else.

Darren is also working on other children's books based on fantasy and horror elements. He completed a book on werewolves last year and hopes to complete another one, possibly next year, but as Darren Shan is a "true story", his future books will have to be published under another name.

Why did you change the front covers of your books?

It was the publishers who decided to make the change. The cover of *Cirque du Freak*, the first one, worked really well, so we kept that style. But the later books did

n't really tie into the themes of the books. And also because the cover was small and the writing was big, people weren't necessarily able to tell the books apart.

We spent a lot of time thinking about it and started to give them a bigger bolder look. I think if you see the new covers stacked together and the older one together, the new ones are much better. The spines each have a big number now and a little skull around it now just to give it a new look. Probably by the end of the series they will probably change it again though to something different.

If someone has all the old book covers can you change them to the new covers?

From book six it's a new look and we've gone back and released the first five books with new covers. If you want all the same covers you will have to go back and buy them again. But as I say by the end of the series they might change again, so my advice is to hold on to the ones you have. The story's the same in them.

Where did you get the name Shan from?

It's just a nickname for Darren O'Shaughnessy - Shan the man! It's a nickname I occasionally had when I was younger. It just popped into my head when I was trying to think of a name to write under.

What have you planned to do at the end of the year?

I'm going to Russia for a holiday at the start of September. I'll go to the Irish match and have a holiday after that in Moscow and St Petersburg.

When I come back I'll do a bit of writing and then I've got a whole month from about mid-October when I'll be out promoting the books. I'll be all around England, Scotland and in Ireland for a week with a mix of shops and

libraries. I don't go to schools as much as I used to now, but I'll be in three libraries here in Limerick, in Dooradoyle, Adare and, I think, Foynes towards the end of October and also in O'Mahony's Bookshop in O'Connell Street.

I go to book fairs as well sometimes. I was in Bologna earlier this year and America and I've done some events in Japan, France and the Netherlands.

If I'm going to a country I try to arrange some events. I'm hoping to go to Australia next year and I might do something while I'm there. What is your favourite Limerick hotel?

I have a home out the road so I've only stayed in one Limerick hotel, that's Jurys Inn.

What is your favourite Limerick restaurant?

I've been to quite a few good ones. A few weeks ago I went to Moll Darby's and it was really nice.

What is your favourite Limerick pub?

I'm terrible at remembering names, but I like Molly Malones. What is your favourite Irish hotel?

I like Jurys in Dublin. I've stayed there quite a few times.

What is your favourite Irish restaurant?

I liked Dromoland Castle best, it was very nice.

What is your favourite Irish newspaper?

Oh, the Limerick Leader of course!

What is your favourite Irish pub?

I don't really go to pubs that much.

What is your favourite book?

Lord of the Rings. I've read it over and over loads of times and loved it and the film. I've done a lot of reading this year. I like to mix fantasy and horror and a bit of science fiction.

Nice Treaty yes vote 'will not dilute Irish representation'

UNDER the Nice Treaty Ireland has exactly the same rights of representation on the European Commission as the larger member states in Europe, including Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Britain, claims Munster Fianna Fail MEP Brian Crowley.

Under the Nice Treaty, from the year 2004, the five larger states in Europe, namely Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Britain will all go to their current right to nominate a second member to the European Commission.

That means that each member state in Europe will nominate one member to the European Commission until the membership of the EU reaches 27 countries.

"This means that small

er member states have the same rights of representation on the European Commission as larger member states.

"The system of membership of the European Commission after the EU has more than 27 members will be decided upon, only by full agreement of all governments in Europe and any new arrangement will be based on the principle of equality and strict rotation between smaller and larger member states.

"It is clear that smaller states in Europe including Ireland, did well out of the reform of the European Commission under the Nice Treaty.

"It is very important that Ireland retains effective representation on the European Commission because this body controls the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Transport Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy and Competition matters," he said.

IRELAND will not lose money due to enlargement.

"The present strength of the Irish economy places us near the top of the EU league and as such, we qualify for less funding.

"Irish power and influence will remain strong and in excess of Ireland's population, in the Council, the Commission and the Parliament," Munster Fianna Fail MEP John Cusnahean told EuroLink South.

"It must be remembered that enlargement will benefit Ireland. The

majority of applicants are small states and as such, Irish interests will often coincide with theirs.

"Additionally, our export driven Irish economy will also benefit from the further expansion of the Single Market and the new business opportunities that become available for Irish business.

"By ratifying the Treaty of Nice, the Irish people will be supporting the creation of an even larger European Union at peace with itself and contributing to a global peace.

Successful enlargement will be a ful

filment of the vision of the founding fathers of Europe.

"Just as the EU in its present form symbolises and end to the bitter legacy of two wars, a new enlarged Europe will also bring an end to the legacy of the Cold War and help ensure peace and stability," he suggested.

THE Munster Independent MEP and president of the European Parliament, Pat Cox said: "The no to Nice last year and the two thirds of the electorate who chose to stay at home have offered a rude awakening to our political system.

"I have had to ask myself is our European love affair coming to an end? Was it always only for the funds or was it something deeper? Was it only for what we could take without asking what we could give?"

"As someone privileged and proud to represent my country on the wide state of contemporary European politics I sincerely and passionately believe that the answer to these questions is no.

"In my view the greatest and most creative act of Irish sovereign independence was the

moment when through pooling some of our sovereignty we added real value to our small state's influence.

"It was this movement towards Europe, with committed and enlightened leadership and conviction that brought us from stagnation to opportunity, from inferiority to achievement, from being a failed entity in the British regional economy to being a competitive player on the global market.

"Intelligent interdependence replaced old isolationism as the guiding light of public policy. As

a small state we never had nor will we have the influence of power based on size and weight.

"Yet in the corridors of power in Europe we have learned to our benefit about the power of influence and have used it to good effect.

"After joining the EEC we quickly began to learn new words and new ways. Gender equality and equal opportunity entered our statute books for the first time. Consumer protection and the creation of a new office of Director of Consumer Affairs became the new way.

"It is Europe which has brought the concept of environmental protection into Irish public policy.

"It is Europe's strict rules on state aids which has freed our politicians from stuffing good money after bad into white elephants.

"In competitive terms we are the healthier for it. It was Europe which liberalised our transport

and our telecommunications, both indispensable cogs in our modern commercial and social wheel.

"Ireland's European experience through the likes of the National Development Programme and its predecessors has dramatically improved the planning, monitoring and evaluation skills of our formidable public administration as well as budgetary discipline.

"Europe has set new standards and has reshaped our approach to regulation with independent agencies mandated to do their tasks free from day to day political interference but subject to political accountability and statutory norms, the Employment, Equality Agency, the Competitive Authority, The Health and Safety Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food Safety Authority and the Office of Director of Communications Regulation," he said.

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