



Bloodline: Children queue up at the Belltable to see Limerick author Darren Shan who was signing copies of his new book Blood Beast

Shan The Man back to where it all started

By NORMA PRENDIVILLE

HUNDREDS of school-children streamed into the Belltable yesterday to hear their favourite author Darren Shan launch and read from his newest book "Blood Beast".

The book is the fifth in a 10-book series known as Demonata, which followed on the series which made Darren's name, the Saga of Darren Shan. And yesterday's event marked the beginning of the book-tour for "Blood Beast".

"This is where it all starts," Darren, whose real name is Darren O'Shaughnessy from Pallaskenry, told the packed theatre. "I often come here. I have often sat out there where you are now and it's very exciting for me to be here on the stage."

But "here on stage", Darren was very much at home as he read "two of the goriest, bloodiest scenes" from his books. "I like to read out the bloody bits," he told his rapt audience. And using different accents, and with an actor's sense of timing, he brought the scenes to scary life for the children who lapped it up and wanted more.

Many of them had brought books from earlier in the series or even from the first series for Darren to sign, which he did with great enthusiasm. But many also bought the new book to add to their library of horror, fantasy and adventure which, Darren says, is what his books are all about.

Darren was born in London, the son of Liam and Breda O'Shaughnessy, but the family moved back to Pallaskenry when he was six years old. He attended Askeaton NS where his mother was a teacher and then went to Copeswood College, Pallaskenry. Now

34, he has been a full-time writer since he was 23. His first two books were for adults and are to be republished next year.

But his big breakthrough was in 2000 when Cirque du Freak, the first in the Saga series, made it into print and scored a huge success.

Another 14 books for children followed in quick succession and in all have sold 10 million copies in 35 countries world-wide.

Darren keeps in touch with his fans, who call themselves Shansters, through his web-site which he updates himself each day.

He also reads all the emails sent to him although he says there are too many to answer them all personally. However, anybody who has ever written a letter to him has gotten a reply. "Letter-writing is a dying art," he told the Limerick Leader adding he believes that anybody who has gone to the trouble of writing and posting a letter deserves a reply.



Step right up: Darren Shan signs copies of his latest book for young fans