

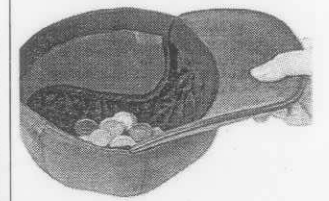
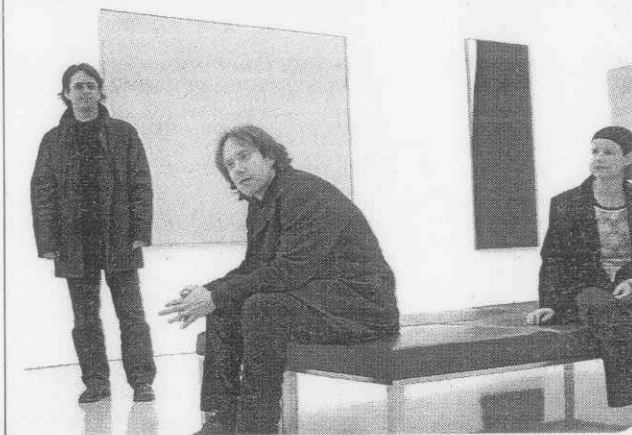
# Leader 2

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2009

**Act three:** the third of four Theatre Hub productions hits the stage next week >>P4



**Haydn seek:** the Austrian trio set for Castleconnell have had a manic year >>P4



**Poor mouth:** we have to dig up the begging bowl for Europe again, says Patricia Feehily >>P3

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They're flying out of the shops too!  
Author Darren Shan, enjoys the peace  
and quiet in Pallaskenry

PICTURE: OWEN SOUTH

He's a 15 million selling publishing phenomenon, working out of the county Limerick countryside, but no matter the success that has gone before, Darren Shan is always looking ahead, not just to the next book, but to the next series – and he still makes time for the fans

**See page 2**



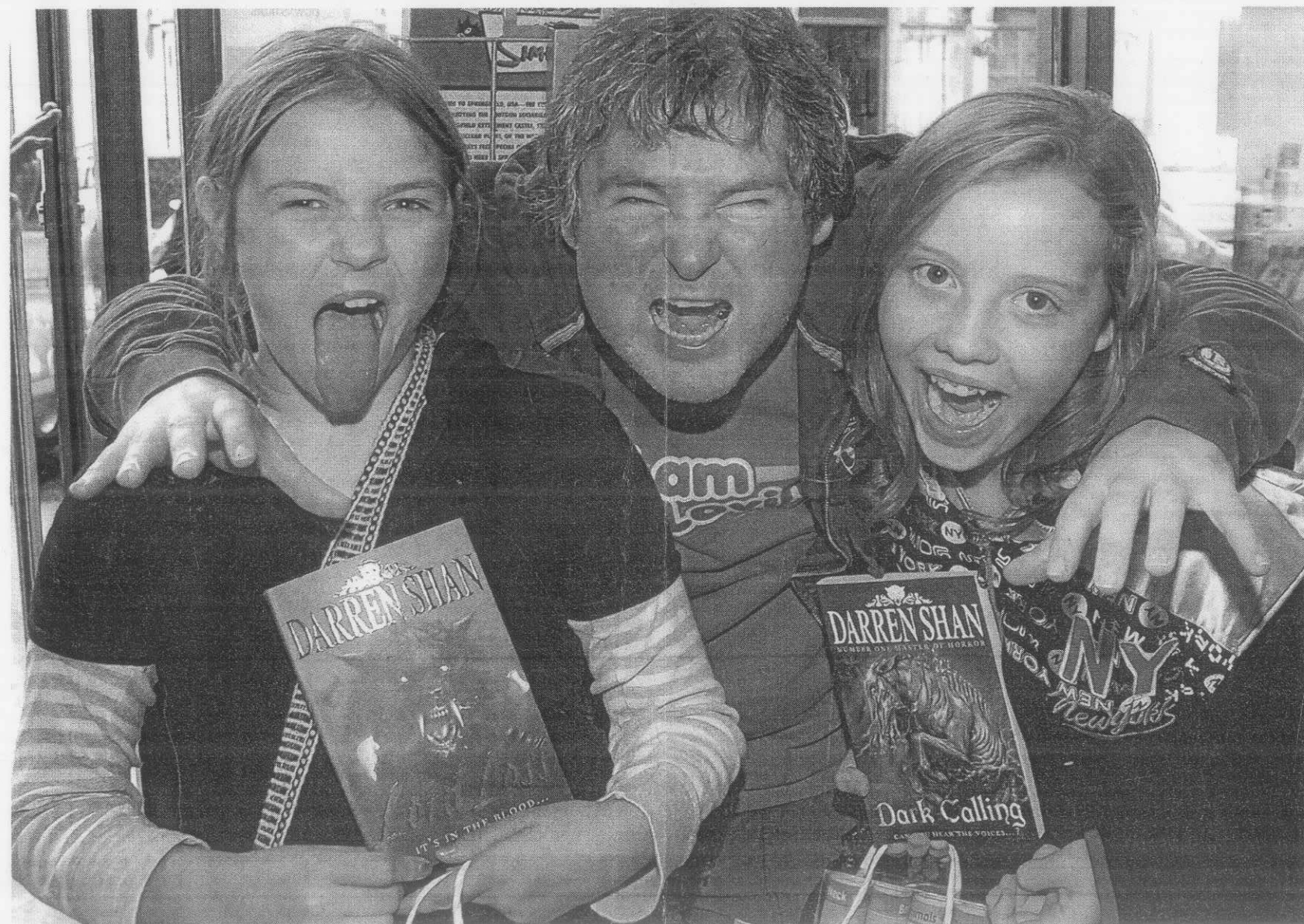
# Shan shows that living in fantasy land pays off

Anyone who has sold 15 million books might be entitled to rest on their laurels, but Darren Shan is looking further ahead than anyone might imagine, writes **Gerard Fitzgibbon**

**D**ARREN Shan is in a pleasant and reflective mood for a man driving to Wetherby, near Leeds, with thoughts of rabid demons and zombie galleons in his head.

He's currently half way through a tour of the UK promoting his new book, the tenth and last of his 'Demonata' series, a circuit that will criss-cross Her Majesty's plot from Brighton to Dundee before it brings him back to Limerick and home. The 37-year-old is the first person to admit that now, with 14 million books sold, he doesn't need to press the flesh anymore. But he's still going to.

"It's very different to sitting in my office writing, but I still see it as part of the job. It's a fun part. You get to meet the fans after they've queued up for hours. It's a really nice feeling. The books have reached such a level where the touring probably isn't essential. But it's something I like giving back. I started out as a fanboy myself, I loved going to comic conventions and



Shan the man with the fans: Darren could leave the publicity tour to less successful authors if he wished, but he still loves to meet the fans and have a chat, with for example, Tara Sheehan and Chloe Shinnors, Elton, Knocklong, during this book signing in O'Mahony's Bookshop, O'Connell St

PICTURE: ADRIAN BUTLER

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publishers turned it down because there was nothing else like it, and they just thought that nobody was going to want to read it. But I can understand where [the publishers] come from. It costs money to publish

other books, circle back to edit drafts and keep driving a creative momentum. The result has been 25 books in ten years, an "extraordinary" return in his own words, and also the comfort in knowing that he isn't

knocking those in the slightest, but as a writer, they don't interest me. I'm always looking to try something a bit different. I don't write for formula. I don't say

have wanted to read when I was their age. I don't try and write something that I think is going to be popular. I never write with the fans in mind, I think that's dangerous. You start trying to please people and can lose

## Darren's screen dreams are set to come true at local Omniplex

**Eugene Phelan**

HE is often spotted walking along quiet country roads in county Limerick or queuing up to buy tickets at the Omniplex in Dooradoyle to view the latest film to hit the screens. But what many do not realise is that Darren O'Shaughnessy from Palaskenry is a literary phenomenon.

He has sold 15 million books worldwide. Yet he hardly gets the plaudits he deserves in the literary world, certainly in Limerick, because he mainly writes for children. But make no mistake about it Darren Shan is a marvel.

In addition to his main home in county Limerick Darren has an apartment in London, to which he escapes for a burst of high-speed living every so often, but he does all his writing in the solitude of his Limerick home where he can work away without any distractions in the peace and quiet of the Irish countryside.

Darren's books are on sale in every continent, in 39 countries, in 31 languages, and have been children's bestsellers in America, Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and other countries. The books have topped adult best-seller charts in Hungary, Japan and Taiwan.

The movie rights to Cirque Du Freak were bought by Universal, and the first movie (which combines elements from the first three books in the series) is due for release on October 23, starring newcomer Chris Massoglia as Darren Shan, along with a wide array of established stars such as Josh Hutcherson, John C Reilly, Salma Hayek, Willem Defoe and Ken Watanabe. The movie is called The Vampire's

the premiere - or win our competition see page 3 for details - will also be able to take part in a question and answer session after the film.

It is rare for Limerick to get a film premiere but it is all down to what the author wanted. The launch has been organised in association with Eason's Book shop.

Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant is a fantasy-adventure about a teenager who unknowingly breaks a 200-year-old truce between two warring factions of vampires.

Pulled into a fantastic life of misunderstood sideshow freaks and grotesque creatures of the night, one teen will vanish from the safety of a boring existence and fulfil his destiny in a place drawn from nightmares.

"One of the first public showings world-wide is going to be at the Omniplex Limerick. I've been going to the Omniplex ever since it opened so I'm delighted that we've been able to make this work. This will be as special for me as it will hopefully be for everyone else who comes," said Darren.

And he added: "I can't wait to share the pleasure of watching it with a group of hardcore, bloodthirsty fans."

Although Darren always wanted to be a writer, it was only in his teenage years that he began writing in his spare time for fun (before that, he only wrote stories if they were for homework). He bought his first typewriter when he was 14, and never looked back, knocking out loads of short stories and comic scripts, and making false starts on several books, which he never completed.

He enjoyed his first taste



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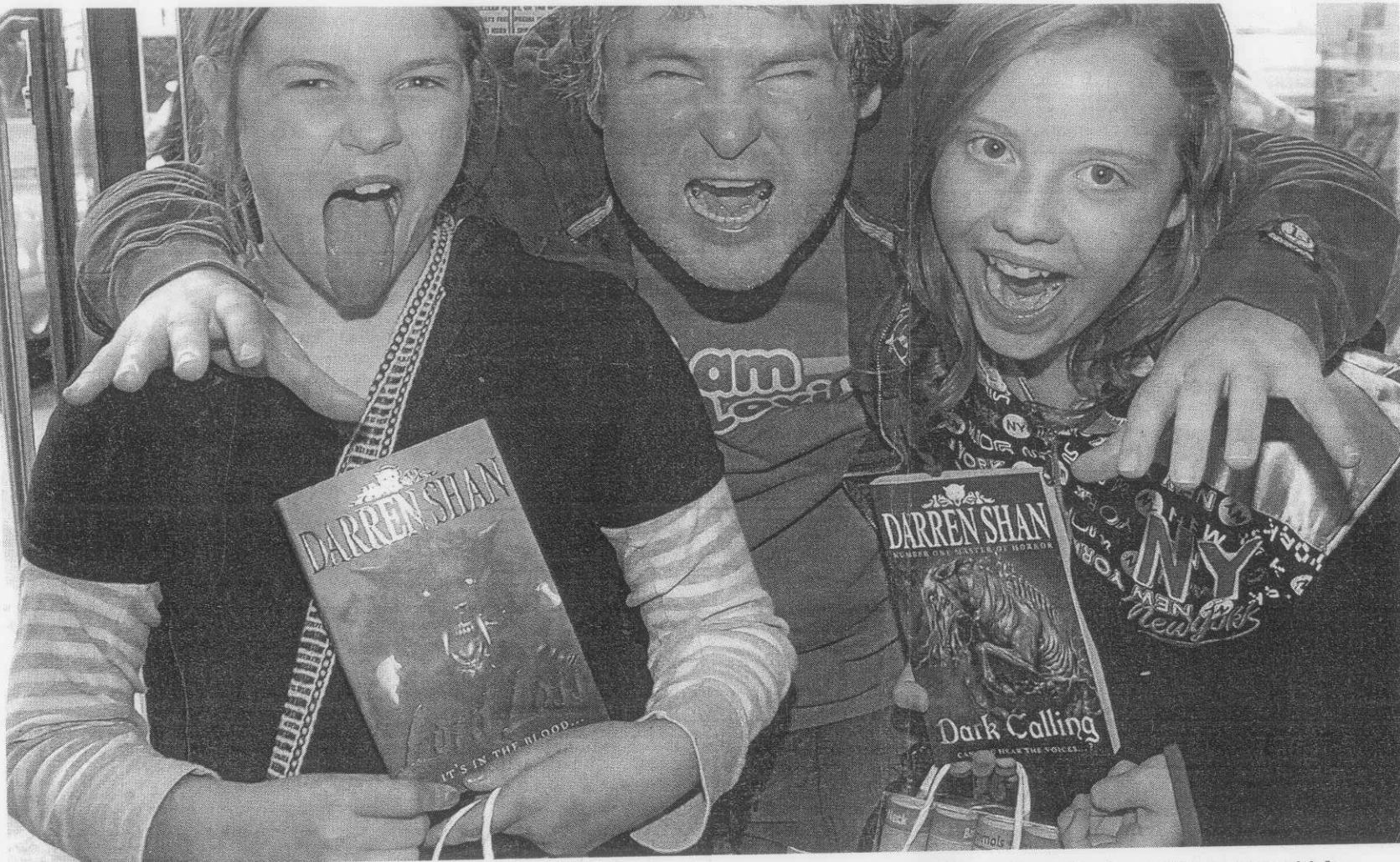
"It's very different to sitting in my office writing, but I still see it as part of the job. It's a fun part. You get to meet the fans after they've queued up for hours. It's a really nice feeling. The books have reached such a level where the touring probably isn't essential. But it's something I like giving back. I started out as a fanboy myself, I loved going to comic conventions and meeting my heroes. I like to give the chance to come along and get the book signed and have a chat."

Shan, real name Darren O'Shaughnessy, has developed into the leading children's horror author in the world by remaining distinctly childish.

Growing up in Pallaskenry after spending his early years in Elephant and Castle in East London, Shan inhaled book after book trying to pick apart the structures and ideas that made them work. Enid Blyton, Stephen King, Tolkien - he drew upon these generational writers like research.

But when he wrote his first novel when he was just 17, he did so because he could not find the sort of gripping and comically violent books he wanted to read. So, much like CS Lewis, he wrote it himself. But it was a gruelling process from there.

"I think most really good books are originals that don't follow a normal formula. But it's difficult to get that sort of book



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marketing their writers as 'the new Darren Shan'. But in the beginning, it was seen as a taboo book. Lord of the Rings was another example - 15 pub-

lishers turned it down because there was nothing else like it, and they just thought that nobody was going to want to read it. But I can understand where [the publishers] come from. It costs money to publish a book."

Shan admits that he saw himself, then and now, as foremost a writer of adult books. But it is as a children's author, particularly through his 'Demonata' and earlier 'The Saga of Darren Shan' series, that he has found his fame and success. Does he mind that role reversal?

"They weren't my first love, but they are my main love. At the moment I do one adult book and two children's books a year. That's the perfect mix for me. There are things I can't do in children's books that I can in adult ones and vice versa.

"But it's not the case that the children's books are something I knock out. It's just the way my mind works. I like juggling several books around, having a break from one for a few months and coming back to it slightly more objective."

That process normally sees him write a full first draft of a novel two or three years ahead of when it first gets published, a time in which he will begin

other books, circle back to edit drafts and keep driving a creative momentum. The result has been 25 books in ten years, an "extraordinary" return in his own words, and also the comfort in knowing that he isn't going to find himself slowing down. He doesn't admit it in as many words, but Shan's fear is being idle.

"I don't have any big celebrations when I get to the end [of a book], because it doesn't feel like anything's ended. Because of the way I work, I'm in a slightly different time zone to everyone else. I've already finished my next five books for the next three years, and I'm working on another series after that. I never get a sense of start and finish. I think bobbing about from one project to the next is good in some ways, because it means there's no delays. It keeps it nice and fluid."

Is it difficult for him to experiment with structure, pacing and other writer's skills when your primary audience judge a book by the prolificacy of its severed heads? Does he look for certain templates and formulas in his work?

"I used to love formulaic books growing up - The Famous Five; The Secret Seven. I'm not

knocking those in the slightest, but as a writer, they don't interest me. I'm always looking to try something a bit different. I don't write for formula. I don't say

**"It's more, 'what would I have wanted to read when I was their age'. I don't try and write something that I think is going to be popular. I never write with the fans in mind, I think that's dangerous. You start trying to please people and can lose what's special about your work"**

"I'm going to do this again because this works". I'm always trying to move forward and experiment a bit. It's always a bit of a risk. I'm always thinking 'is this going to work?'

"But it's more what I would

have wanted to read when I was their age. I don't try and write something that I think is going to be popular. I never write with the fans in mind, I think that's dangerous. You start trying to please people and can lose what's special about your work."

In that vein, there is surprisingly little paranoia about Shan on the eve of the first Hollywood adaptation of one of his books. 'The Vampire's Assistant: Cirque du Freak' has cost Universal Studios in the region of \$80 million to produce, but Shan has had no input at all in it. He admits that he didn't and never will want any. "It's best to leave Hollywood off!"

But he is excited by the prospect of people, perhaps, being drawn back into the books after it is released.

"The hard thing about publishing is making people aware that your books exist. You don't have the sort of funds Hollywood has. Cirque du Freak cost \$80 million to make, and they might spend another \$20 million publicising it. They can reach people we can't directly, and we can just hope that people who see the film like it and decide to check out the books, and come over to my world."

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"It was a dream of mine, many years ago, that if a film ever got made of my books, that I would love for the premiere to take place in Limerick, at my local cinema, where I've been going to films for as long as I can remember. And guess what dreams do come true," said Darren.

It is the first time an Irish premiere has taken place outside of Dublin and promises to be a massive event for Limerick.

Darren has lived virtually all his life in Limerick in Pallaskenry and went to school in Askeaton and the Salesians College. The launch will be held in the Omniplex cinema in the Crescent Shopping Centre but most fans will have to wait until October 23 for the general release of the film. And those lucky enough to get invited to

association with Eason's Book shop.

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He enjoyed his first taste of literary success at age 15, as a runner-up in a television script-writing competition for RTE in Ireland, with a dark comedy script titled A Day in the Morgue. In January 2000, his first children's book, Cirque du Freak, which he'd written as a fun side-project, was published.

The first book in a series titled The Saga of Darren Shan (or Cirque du Freak, as it's known in America), it attracted rave reviews and an ever-growing army of fans hungry to learn more about vampires which were quite unlike any that anyone had ever seen before!

Shan has now returned to his first love and is once again writing for adults as well. He has had two adult books published: Procession of the Dead and Hell's Horizon. A third, City of the Snakes, goes on sale in March 2010.