

Lord of the Rams



Lord of the Rams is a self-published comedy memoir, from author Ronan Smith. According to Ronan, "several chapters in the book are set in Oldcastle and many of the characters hail from Meath, meaning that it will be of extra interest to those in the Meath area". We caught up with him recently to find out more.

What inspired you to write Lord of the Rams?

I guess the idea stemmed from my desire to write a book that casual readers – perhaps people who seldom pick up a book – could enjoy. And I think the best stories are often the ones based on fact – real people doing the most outrageous things that you couldn't even begin to make up. One reviewer recently commented that I "probably had this book written in [my] head for quite some time" and he was definitely on the mark. I've been fortunate enough to grow up with and meet some very eccentric characters over the years, and I guess one day I realised that some of the shenanigans we got up to would make for a good book.

And I think most people, not just the Irish, will be able to relate to the characters in Lord of the Rams. There's not too many books out there that can make you laugh, but I'd like to think that this is one of them.

How did you feel when you were writing the book?

Writing Lord of the Rams was a slow but enjoyable process. I certainly couldn't be accused of rushing things. It took me three years to get the first draft together and another year to apply the final spit and polish, but I enjoyed every minute of it. I didn't want to finish writing the book and then realise a year or two later that I'd forgotten important elements, so I spent a lot of time mulling ideas and memories around in my head before committing them to paper. Overall I'm happy with how it turned out.

You published the book yourself. Any regrets that you took that approach?

No, not at all. I always had a vision for the book and thought, given the "play it safe" approach of the publishing industry in general, that

a conventional publisher would demand changes/compromises to the book that I wasn't prepared to make. Publishing it myself allowed me to be free to control all aspects of the book, from the cover design and marketing of it to, most importantly, the story itself.

On the downside, it's definitely been harder to promote and distribute the book myself than I initially thought – especially when working full time. And then there are the costs, which have been substantial. So it's great that the organisers of Le Chéile have given me the opportunity to sell the book to a ready-made audience at the festival. I'm looking forward to meeting some familiar and not so familiar faces on the day.

And now, a year after the initial release of the book, has it all been worth it?

Yes, most definitely. I think most writers like to get feedback on their work and I'm no different. I wrote Lord of the Rams with a male audience in mind as I felt that particular market was being neglected by the

publishing industry. So I feel my work has been somewhat validated by some reports I've received about fellas who, having barely ever read a book in their lives, read Lord of the Rams and enjoyed it. Having said that, it would seem that more women than men are reading the book, and that it itself has been a pleasant surprise.

As a massive Lord of the Rings fan, I have to ask where the name for your book came from? Is there a connection to Tolkien's classic?

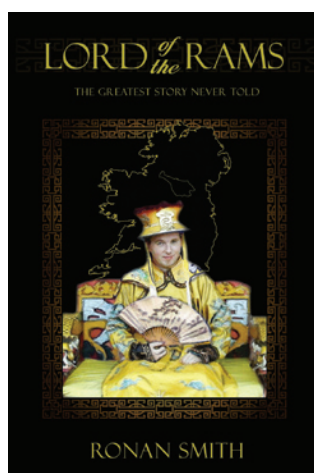
No, there isn't a connection – at least not directly. A friend of mine brought me back a t-shirt from New Zealand, which had a big picture of a Ram's head on the front with text beneath it saying "Lord of the Rams". Obviously the t-shirt was a play on the books/movies. However, given that my nickname, and thus the main character in the book, is called "Rams", I thought "Lord of the Rams" would make a great name for the book. And the rest is history!

Read an extract from the book

This short extract is taken from Chapter 15 of Lord of the Rams. The year is 1996. Rams and Goosey are now in college in Waterford, living with another Munterconnaught man – a certain Gavin O'Dowd. Money is at an all-time low, but Dowd takes it upon himself to show his flatmates how to furnish the flat with the bare essentials ...

Cablelink was another commodity that the lads could ill afford but couldn't do without either. For fear of dying from boredom in the flat, they had no choice but to rent a television from a nearby electrical shop. Yet, even with a set of rabbit's ears that Goosey had brought with him to Waterford, the lads could only muster the faintest reception from the television. A Cablelink connection would supply all the terrestrial stations and many more besides, but that came at a price and, having already splashed out on renting the television, the lads couldn't afford to pay cable bills.

Dowd surmised that all of the other residents in the building must surely have had a Cablelink connection, and so



he decided to pay a visit to his closest neighbour who lived in a flat, which was situated further up the small flight of stairs that linked all the flats in the building together.

X-File Man, as he would come to be known, appeared to be a quiet yet mysterious character in his late forties who had been living in the area for many years. The lads had seen him coming and going but had not yet spoken to him, and Dowd was quite surprised, upon knocking on his door, to find a friendly albeit strange man welcoming him into his

sitting room for a chat.

The first thing Dowd couldn't help but notice was that the walls of the flat were almost completely covered with posters and photographs of Gillian Anderson. She played the female lead character in The X-Files, which was one of the biggest shows on television at that time. A 12-year-old boy plastering his bedroom walls with posters of a television star is one thing, but when a middle-aged man does likewise with his entire living quarters, one could be forgiven for assuming that he needs to get out more often.

The plan was simple in theory: Dowd would ask X-File Man for permission to run a cable from his television to the one downstairs in Flat 4A. But one cannot simply cut to the chase on these occasions, and a bit of small talk was the least he could do by way of a common courtesy to his potential cable provider. Dowd was never a man short of a few words and, having exhausted the topic of how shite the weather had been for the past few weeks, he turned his attention to the posters adorning every wall in

the room.

'I see you're a bit of a fan of Gillian there,' he remarked.

'Oh, she's an amazing woman,' answered X-File Man, his eyes lighting up at this rare opportunity to discuss his dream woman with a fellow human being.

'She's something special all right,' Dowd said, nodding his head and smiling as if trying to make himself believe what he was saying while simultaneously glancing at the door to ensure that it hadn't been locked behind him.

'There's Gillian eating an ice-cream,' returned X-File Man, pointing to a photo above the artificial fireplace. 'And there's one of her getting ready for bed.' An uncomfortable silence followed before he continued. 'That one over there is Gillian's sister. And beside that is a photo of Gillian brushing her teeth.'

Dowd was beginning to wish he'd raised the subject of the posters after asking about the cable. Meanwhile X-File Man continued ranting, his tongue now hanging out of his mouth, causing drool to slither

menacingly down his chin.

Finally, as the Gillianophile caught his breath for a moment, an exasperated Dowd seized the opportunity and asked him about the cable. Fortunately, Dowd's tireless groundwork had put him into his neighbour's good books and, despite Dowd's half-hearted offer to contribute something towards his monthly Cablelink bill, X-File Man agreed to supply cable to the lads free of charge.

Later that day, Dowd and his flatmates visited a hardware shop with the view to buying a length of cable, which would be used to connect X-File Man's television to theirs, thereby providing them with the free cable Dowd had worked so hard to get.

'How much cable do you need?' asked the shopkeeper. 'About this much,' Dowd replied, throwing a ball of wool across the counter, to the bewilderment of the assistant.

Rather than risk guessing how much cable would be needed to connect the two flats, the lads had purchased a ball of wool and measured the distance, almost to the inch.

Wool was cheap; cable was not and, if they'd haphazardly and incorrectly estimated that 40 feet of cable was needed when 30 feet would suffice, they would have been further out of pocket than necessary.

Returning to the flat with a cut-to-size piece of cable and connectors, the boys set to work in a scene that could have been straight out of The A-Team. Dowd, having briefly discussed the merits of Gillian Anderson's ample breasts with his neighbour, connected one end of the cable to X-File Man's television and then threw the remainder out the window to the Rams who was waiting below on a flat roof, which ran along the sitting room window of Flat 4A. He then passed the cable through the window to Goosey who, within seconds, hooked it into the back of the rented television.

Finally the lads had picture, sound and a means of entertainment. Nevertheless, the best entertainment is often self-created and that would ring true over the course of the following weeks and months in Flat 4A.