

From Dublin to Munterconnaught

This extract, which is from the first chapter of Lord of the Rams, introduces the Rams and chronicles his early days at school in Munterconnaught... (Interview with author on facing page.)

Munterconnaught was the tiniest of rural communities, where there was little to do and plenty of time in which to do it. The focal point of the parish was undoubtedly the shop, Boylan's, which was attached to a pub of the same name and was across the road from the football field and clubrooms. A further mile down the road was Knocktemple National School, and it was there that the Rams started his adventures.

Three years after moving to Munterconnaught, the Rams enrolled as a pupil at the primary school. It was a tiny building with just three classrooms, three teachers and two or three classes in each classroom. As he entered his classroom for the first time, he couldn't help but notice numerous toy-laden tables lining the walls along each side of the room. At first, he thought he'd arrived at a massive toy store, but he soon discovered that strict rules forbade the children from playing with the toys.

It was lunchtime and across the room from the Rams sat another boy of the same age who was also experiencing his first day at school. His name was Keith Geraghty and, unlike the Rams, he had brought a few toys to school with which to pass the time. But the teacher, Mrs. McMahon, took a bit of a shine to Keith's farmyard animals, and it wasn't long before they were sitting proudly among her other collectibles. As it happened, Keith wasn't in the habit of sharing his toys with middle-aged women, and shortly thereafter he reclaimed them on behalf of every four-and-a-half-year-old who has ever had his toys confiscated.

Unfortunately, Keith's actions didn't amuse McMahon, who forced him to surrender his toys or face the wrath of her almighty 30-inch ruler. Over the next few days the two boys gradually smuggled Keith's prized possessions from McMahon's Alcatraz-like mountain of toys and, in the process of doing so, formed the foundations of what would become a long-standing friendship.

Keith lived about half a mile away from the school and always walked home afterwards with his brothers while the Rams made the journey home on a bus that wasn't fit to carry farm animals. The four Geraghty brothers would often be seen eating gooseberries off the bushes on their way home and, as a result, Keith's brother, Trevor, soon picked up the nickname Goosey. Eventually Keith also earned the same nickname but, unlike Trevor, the name stuck with him for life.

A few weeks into the school year the baby

infants class was complete. Rams, Goosey, seven girls and another boy, Derek Stanley, made up a bigger than average class in a smaller than average school. Among the boys, it was common practice to refer to one's males by their surname, and so Derek soon became known as Stanley, then as Stan the Man and eventually just Stano. Being the only boys in the class, the three quickly became great friends.

Mrs. McMahon taught the two infant classes and, following the obligatory two-year stretch the boys found themselves in Miss Plunkett's class, where they would spend the next three years of their education. It was during those formative years that the Rams would start showing signs of being too smart for his own good, which meant that he wasn't always popular with people in authority.

Typically, Plunkett would be telling a story or attempting to teach a lesson when the Rams would give his 10 cents' worth, finishing her sentences with comments that would leave her speechless.

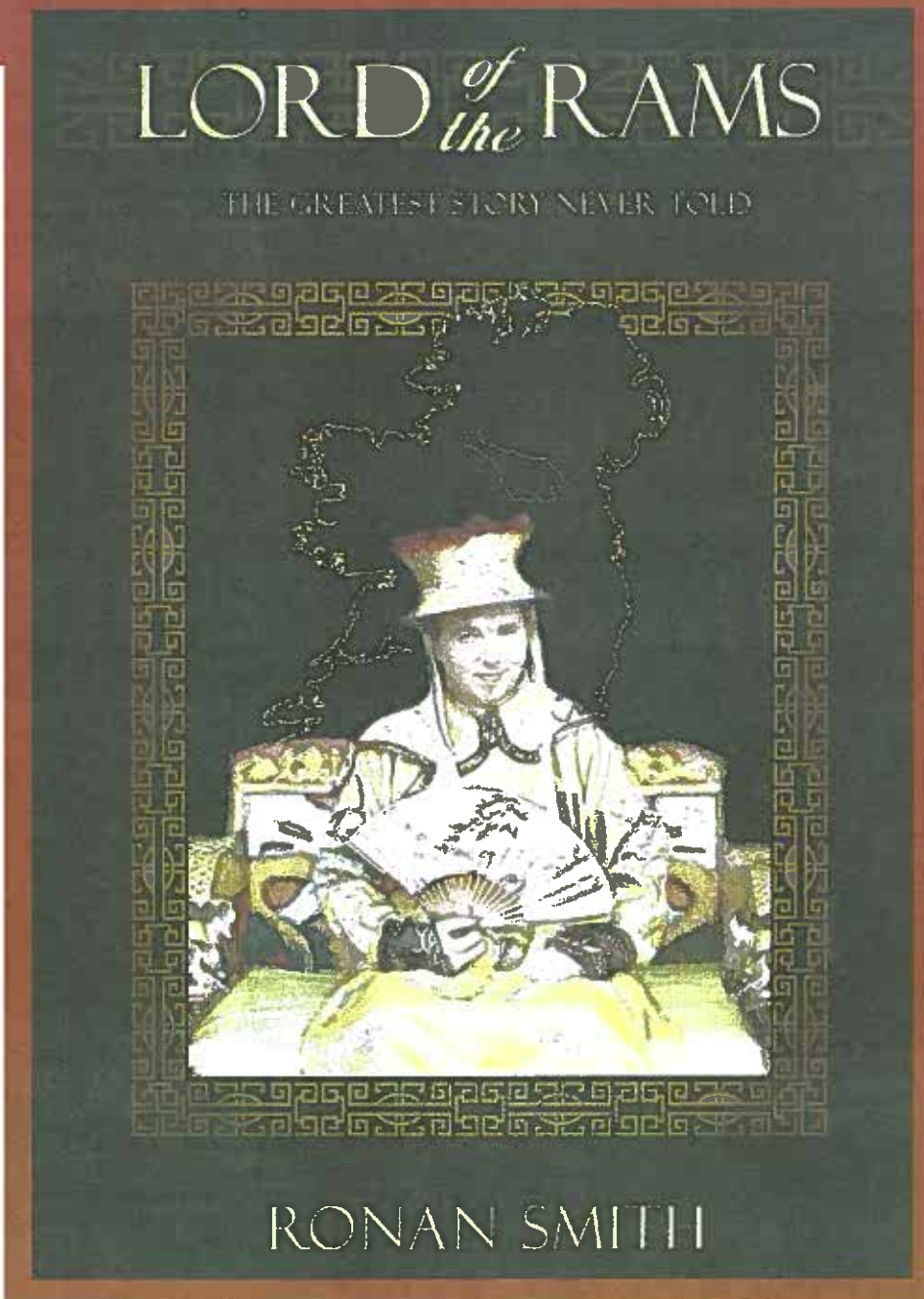
Plunkett was a young teacher, in her early 20s, and had probably never been trained in college to deal with the anecdotes of an eight-year-old boy who could have out-talked politicians. Usually, she would accept defeat and laugh along with the rest of the class. A common way of dealing with pupils who continuously talked out of turn was to ask them if they wanted to teach the class, and this would always result in them falling silent, thereby handing the victory to the teacher. But one day, while the Rams was being particularly smart-arsed, Plunkett made the fatal mistake of asking him the question he'd been waiting for.

'You seem to know it all. Why don't you come up here and teach the class if you think you're so smart?'

'Ah sure I'll give it a go,' quipped the Rams, face beaming.

Plunkett looked slightly fazed to see him approaching the top of the class so confidently, but she quietly took a seat in the corner of the room, feeling somewhat safe in the knowledge that he would surely fall flat on his face and embarrass himself in front of the entire class. But the Rams was out to prove that he was more than capable of teaching a group of seven-10-year-olds. Sure how tough could it be?

Rams grabbed a piece of chalk and proceeded



with the mathematics class he had rudely interrupted just moments earlier. Initially, the rest of the pupils fell quiet but, as the Rams grew in confidence and claimed ownership of the blackboard, they began to revel in his unique method of teaching. For the next five minutes he called up Goosey, Stano and some of the younger lads from the class below him to complete some of the problems Plunkett had chalked onto the board prior to the takeover. Once completed, the Rams decided to take questions from the audience as Plunkett looked on, her lower jaw almost hitting the ground. The last question came from Paul McGovern who, like everyone else, was enjoying Rams' unorthodox method of teaching.

'An bhfuil cead agam dul amach go dtí an leithreas mas é do thoil é?' he said in Irish, which was mandatory at school in order for students to gain permission to use the toilet.

As was always the case, the Rams needed little more than a millisecond to compose an answer.

'No, you can piss in your trousers.'

The class erupted in laughter, but Miss Plunkett could take no more. She burst into tears and ran out of the class for the safe confines of the staff room. Suddenly the laughter came to an abrupt end and one or two of the pupils, tearing reprehension upon her return, begged the Rams to rectify the situation.

For once, he felt that he may have over-stepped the mark, and he knew he had to act quickly before Mrs. McMahon, or worse still, the headmaster Declan Cooney, found Plunkett crying in the staff room. Five minutes of apologising put everything straight and the pair returned to class. The Rams tightened the reins on his mouth for the remainder of the day and Plunkett — unsurprisingly — never asked anyone to teach the class again.

Lord of the Rams

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EVER meet somebody and think, 'that guy's mad in the head'? Well, many people have thought that on meeting the Rams for the first time, and maybe they were correct to some degree.

His mother always attributed his unique personality to the time his oldest sister, Vanessa, pushed him down a flight of stairs when he was just two years of age. On closer examination, however, he appeared to be no different to the many colourful people who surrounded him in the tiny parish of Munterconnaught.

That is the opening paragraph of a side-splitting new book by 30-year-old Munterconnaught man, Ronan Smith (being launched in Dublin tomorrow night). While the book is largely Ronan's own autobiography, it is also gives an insightful and hilarious account into life in rural Ireland over the 25 years from the late 70s to the noughties.

It could be the story and adventures of any cheeky, 20-something chappie growing up in the sticks.

Speaking to Plus, Ronan admits that many people think he has notions of himself for writing an autobiography based on 25 years in the life of a young webmaster and editor. While agreeing it was to some extent self-indulgent, Ronan said he wrote the book in the third person and the tales were as much about his friends as just himself.

"Well, they say you should always write about things you know. And if there's one thing I know about, it's my own life," he said.

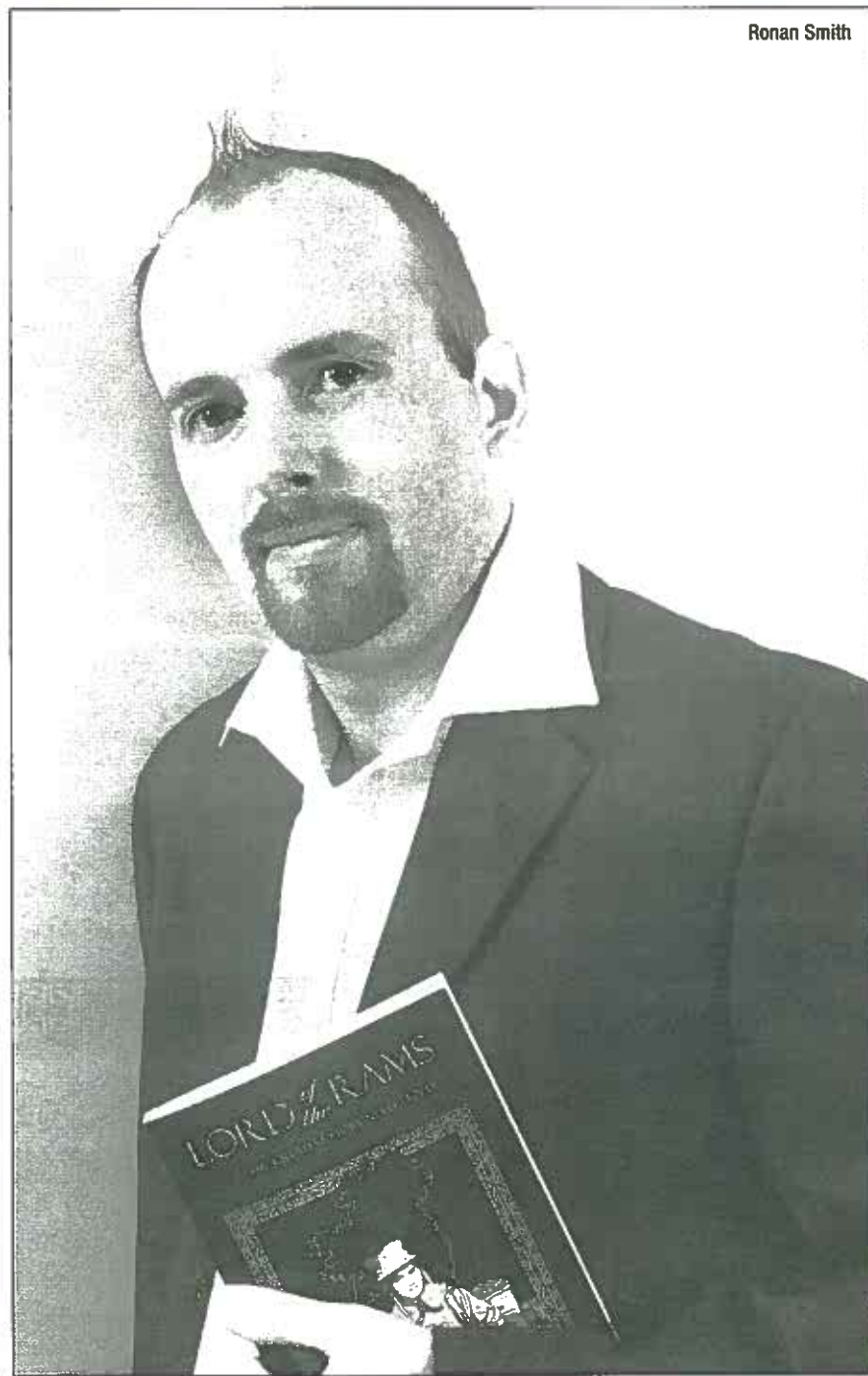
"I think the book industry has, in some respects, been taken over with chick-lit and biographies about people who have enjoyed five minutes of fame and done little else.

"While I'm not claiming Lord of the Rams is going to save the industry or change the world, I think it will appeal to a market that is currently neglected to some extent - that is young adult males," says Ronan.

"Sure it's an autobiography about an ordinary man but it doesn't take itself too seriously. Lord of the Rams is primarily a tongue-in-cheek look at growing up in Ireland, and I believe that it will appeal not just to males but also to some females who want to read something that will genuinely entertain them," he adds.

Ronan feels that while the book is full of Cavan wit, humour and personality, not to mention stories based in well-known places and involving Cavan people, it's something that all people, regardless of nationality, will be able to identify with and enjoy.

"I always wrote the book with a broad audience in mind. It will appeal to peo-



Lord of the Rams will be officially launched tomorrow in Dickey Reilly's in Dublin at 6pm. A Cavan launch will take place on August 1 in The Ramor Inn at 7pm. The book will retail at €14.50 and is available to order on the website or in selected bookshops.

Ronan Smith

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ple not just in rural Cavan but anywhere in Ireland," he said.

While always interested in reading and writing in his youth, Ronan admits that he originally penned a lot of the stories in the book when he was about 13 but wrote the first book of what has since become The Lord of the Rams in 2003, returning to it on-and-off over the past few years before finishing it in February of this year.

Initially the project was meant to be Ronan's memoirs but it developed into something more as the stories built.

The books takes us on the Rams' adventures from Cavan to Meath, Waterford and Dublin in the college years and further afield with his childhood friends to London and other destinations abroad. "It's not so much about me but more about the people I grew up with. It's really a book about friendship," he said.

Ronan's favourite chapter is 28, London's Calling. It follows the Rams' adventures on a weekend visit to London. It's a Saturday night and Lisa Hetherington, an old school friend from Munterconnaught who is studying nursing, has invited the Rams and friends to a party at Saint Mary's hospital accommodation in Paddington. The extract can be read on Ronan's website online www.lordoftherams.com.

Meanwhile, we have published an extract from the first chapter (facing page), where it opens in Munterconnaught.