

FIVE MINUTES WITH...



Ronan Smith's debut novel, *Lord of the Rams*, is best described as a comedy memoir set primarily in rural Ireland over a 25 year period. Essentially a fast-moving, tongue-in-cheek account of the adventures of one young man (Smith) and his eccentric group of friends, it follows them as they work their way through school, college and life, with many calamitous misadventures along the way. *Lord of the Rams* is really just an ordinary story but, by fusing it with a thick coat of humour, Smith has told it in quite an extraordinary way.

■ Why the strange title 'Lord of the Rams'?

'Rams', as the reader discovers in the book's introduction, is my nickname, my alter ego if you like, and thus the 'hero' of the book. The name *Lord of the Rams* stems from a t-shirt I received from a friend many years ago. There was a big picture of a Ram's head on the front with text beneath it saying 'Lord of the Rams'. At the time, I was at the early stages of writing the book and the name seemed perfect for the title.

■ What made you think people would be interested – you're not even famous!

Exactly. And that's what I believe makes this book appeal to a very wide demographic. Walk into any bookstore these days and you'll be hard pressed to find a book you can actually relate to – haven't we all read enough 'celebrity' biographies by now? I wrote *Lord of the Rams* with one thing in mind; to create the kind of book that I, as a young male reader, would like to read. As it turns out, the honesty and humour prevalent throughout the book has meant that just as many females as males are now reading it. In fact, many of them have told me that they really related to my misadventures and were caught laughing out loud on the bus. That's the kind of impact I wanted to make.

■ Is this your first bash at writing then?

It's my first proper attempt at writing an entire book. I remember writing the majority of a book when I was a child, maybe about 10-12. I'm sure it was probably terrible drivel but I wish I hadn't lost hope and binned it, just so I could look at it now from an adult's perspective and have a good laugh at my own expense. *Lord of the Rams* was in my head for so long that I honestly don't remember when I decided to write it. In the end, it took me about four years (three writing, one year polishing).

■ Can you give me an example of the riotous situations you write about?

Many of my favourites centre on my time spent in college in Waterford in the mid-nineties. Money was low, so my flatmates and I often took extreme measures to ensure we could put food on the table, heat our dilapidated flat and still have money for a few beers. An example of how we obtained free cable is featured in an extract from the book on my website, but there are many other great stories – finding ingenious ways to cheat at college assignments, dealing with a genuine stalker, living rent-free for a number of weeks, strange neighbours; all stories people will be able to relate to (except perhaps for the stalker episode). There are riotous tales aplenty – setting myself on fire at mass, attacking the school bus, getting into discos, coming face to face with a SWAT team in London... the list is endless.

■ What were the best things about growing up in Ireland?

I think I grew up in an Ireland that is quickly disappearing – where people helped each other out, where the friends you made in school where the friends you kept for life, and where money wasn't the be-all and end-all. It's only when I look back 20 years that I realise what a special time it was to grow up in Ireland in the eighties. Cycling down country roads on my trusty BMX, playing Hide-and-Seek in the cloak room at school, going fishing with my father – all every day acts that are a reminder to me of that time and which I've tried to relay with humour in the book.

■ Have you mellowed as you get older?

Yes, I think I've mellowed a little, but I still have that wild 'Rams' persona that is evident throughout the book. It's a bit like the Incredible Hulk. I can spend the entire week working as mild-mannered David Banner and then something triggers me and next thing I know I'm at Karneval in Germany saving my friend BA Baracus from a severe beating at the hands of Superman – perhaps a story I'll save for a sequel, if it ever happens.

■ If your book was adapted into a movie, who would play you?

I think it would have to be The Rock – I'm not sure if he'd be able to pull off the Irish accent but he sure can talk the talk, which would be very important for the role. And it helps that we look almost identical. Of course, someone else would have to play me as a boy. I think the little chap who played Dewey in *Malcolm in the Middle* would be perfect – although he's probably too old now. Maybe Dustin the Turkey, who holds the distinct advantage of being somewhat ageless...

■ Visit www.lordoftherams.com for more information.

SHELLEY MARSDEN picks the brain of author Ronan Smith...

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