

Local Author: Dan O'Mahony
Episode 4

[Lisa] Dia dhuit! (Hello!) This is Podcrawl Podchroal, the podcast from the McClelland Irish Library. I'm your host, Lisa, the Assistant Librarian with Dan O'Mahony, local author, who has published two new books in October of 2022. Let's find out more information about Illumina and Death's Fair Maiden, which are available for members to check-out.

[Lisa] What can you tell me about Illumina?

[Dan] Uh, Illumina is about a boy who, named Ronnie Jackman, whose parents died in a fire. Uh, just gotta add the name Ronnie Jackman is actually an homage to two big literary giants. Uh, but I'm not gonna tell you who. So he's living with his grandparents now, he's at a new school. He's inspired by a mysterious substitute teacher to write fantasy stories that end up helping him deal with the trauma that he's gone through. The main narrative has to do with Ronnie and his little personal journey, but I've included the stories that he quote unquote wrote throughout the main narrative. It's kind of experimental, something innovative. I wasn't sure how people received it, but so far it's been getting five star reviews on Amazon, so yay.

[Lisa] That's great.

[Dan] Thank you.

[Lisa] What genre would you say it falls under?

[Dan] There are elements of fantasy, especially in Ronnie's stories. Um, but later on his fantasy world ends up invading reality, the real world. Yeah, so he's gotta learn to basically get his imagination under control. It's also a coming of age story, in fact a lot of my stories are coming of age, in a sense, no matter how fantastic they might appear on the surface.

[Lisa] What is the age range for this book?

[Dan] I intended to write for ages 8 to 12. Uh, that's called middle grade fiction in, you know, the literary world. Um, and if you're writing, you need to, you're supposed to write towards a specific age group, or at least claim to be in that for marketing purposes. Um, but yeah, young kids have enjoyed my work, uh, so have teens and adults, which I take as a good thing. There's a great quote by C. S. Lewis that I, I love where he said a, a

good children's story should be enjoyed by adults as well, so I, I go by that, and since adults do enjoy my work as well, I guess I'm doing a good job.

[Lisa] Yes. I, I really like that quote.

[Dan] He's an Irish man.

[Lisa] Yes. Yes.

[Dan] Thank you.

[Lisa] Um, and then, is Illumina part of the series?

[Dan] Uh, possibly. Uh, there are mysteries about Illumina that need to be explored. I've got some kernels, but they're not ready yet.

[Lisa] What inspired this story?

[Dan] Uh, I love to write. I've always loved high fantasy stories. Big stories like Lord of the Rings and... Chronicles of Narnia and, um, Conan the Barbarian. I would write stories like that when I was younger. And now that I've been writing more seriously, I want to do, uh, I wanted to do one, but I want to make it stand out.

Um, I had a, I once worked, knew an agent when I was living in California. She hosted a writer's group and she talked about how she would get, um, she got a query recently, a query letter. For those of you who don't know, a query letter is someone who's trying to land, to get an agent to represent their book. We'll send them what's called a query letter and if the agent likes what's inside of it, thinks the story has potential, they'll take that author on. She wasn't going to take this guy on. She said the query that her started with, um, You're about to read the next Lord of the Rings. And she said she immediately trashed it. Um, a story about a kid writing stories. And then including those stories inside the main narrative. I was a fan of, uh, The Never Ending Story.

Which did something similar, but um, Yeah, I tried to weave the actual story, the story in with the real world. Like they did in that book, but it wasn't working. So, each story is just, it's on its own. And it's got a title and it says, by Ronnie Jackman. And they're in between certain chapters. I kind of call it my love letter to the fantasy genre.

And, uh, it's also about, too, the, the craft of writing, the power of the craft of writing. Cause Ronnie's able to use it to help him heal his trauma. Uh, he created a heroic alter

ego, um, for himself. He turns friends, and he puts his friends in his stories, too. Some bullies, too, die a horrible death. And, um, he's able to create a target for, to aim, to take out the guilt and the anger and the, his grief over what happened to his parents, um, he's able to create a bad guy to aim all that at. So it's his target. So that's, that's the book. That's Illumina.

[Lisa] That sounds really interesting.

[Dan] Thank you.

[Lisa] Without any spoilers, what is the story of Death's Fair Maiden?

[Dan] The main character is a boy named Tommy. Well, he has a vision, we'll say first, that occurs about something about a girl trying to run away with her boyfriend.

And they're set up and they're murdered by someone, I won't say who. And um, that vision haunts Tommy, especially the vision of the girl. And then when his great grandmother is dying, she's the only family member that he's really close to, the one that genuinely cares about him. Um, a woman named Eve steps in, uh, she's a hospice worker. She looks exactly like the girl that's from his vision, so in a haunting sense [?], she's, um, she's there. She helps Tommy and the family deal with great grandma's death. She becomes a fixture in Tommy's life, even after she tells him her secret, um, they become closer. Their, um, relationship deepens.

[Lisa] Is this also fantasy?

[Dan] Um, fantasy romance.

[Lisa] Okay.

[Dan] So, um, I jokingly refer to it as boy meets banshee. And, um, it's my first attempt at young adult fiction. Everything else has been middle grade. The subject matter seemed to fit, because it deals with death. And then, um, I felt to counteract death, you should have love, romance. And then I was like, I don't think romance would work in middle grade. So I gotta bump, bump it up a notch.

[Lisa] Or maybe for a little more mature audience.

[Dan] Yeah. Yeah, there's profanity and some violence and some sex, but I don't overdo it. I'm not graphic or exploitative at all. And it's also it's coming of age as well in regards

to Tommy and perhaps to Eve as well. There's elements of historical fiction in there as well because Eve is essentially immortal. So she's lived a lot, seen a lot. And so there are these chapters that are scenes from Eve's life that Tommy is seeing in visions. And they're tied in with the narrative in ways. Yeah, there's one that, um, focuses on Brian Boru, another on Donald O'Sullivan during his famous march. And then there's another one, um, with [?] during the Easter Rising. She's seen a lot and it's had an effect on her.

[Lisa] Is Death Spare Maiden part of a series?

[Dan] Yeah, like Illumina, possibly. It could be. The ending is very open ended. And it's like, let's just say that the two main characters have a, you know...a whole new world, or worlds, to explore together.

[Lisa] What inspired this story?

[Dan] It centers on the myth of the Banshee. In my previous book, The Fifth Cycle, I explored Irish myth and folklore. That book is the first in the series, so I'll probably continue, you know, continue to explore more about Irish myth and folklore in future installments. I wasn't sure, though, if I could fit everything in. So I decided to do some, uh, create stories that took place outside of The Fifth Cycle that could be standalone or on our own series. So this one's about a banshee and, um, I delved into, I really researched the myth of the banshee. So I'm pretty, I'm very true to that. But throw in a little bit of the pop culture banshee that we know and love. And it's the first, I've got a story plan to focus on selkies. That's gonna be... Down the line, and it's about Selkie. If you don't know what a Selkie is, a Selkie is a shapeshifter, um, that can be male and female, who transform into seals. And that came about because if you ever go to Ireland, if you see the coast, there are a lot of seals.

[Lisa] Oh. Where can listeners find Illumina and Death's Fair Maiden to read?

[Dan] Um, they're exclusively on Amazon right now. They're in e-book and paperback. And I'm looking to explore, expand into the world of, uh, audiobooks soon, in the near future.

[Lisa] Oh, wow, that, that would be interesting. Would you be the one voicing it?

[Dan] I'm so nervous about doing that. I found like a text to speech program that's supposed to be very authentic. So I want to give that a try and see how it works. And like, this one's especially cool because they do kids voices too. And I thought it would

be fun to have, since all my books are first person narrative, the protagonist is telling the story, I thought it would be fun to have a kid reading.

[Lisa] How long have you been writing?

[Dan] Oh, really, since I could pick up a pencil. Um, but I didn't really film my voice until like 15 years ago.

[Lisa] Who is a go to author for you?

[Dan] I've been a huge fan of Neil Gaiman. I've followed him ever since his comic book days, with the, uh, The Sandman. And I love how he was able to transition to prose writing, and he writes for all ages. I mean, seriously, from little kids, middle grade, young adult, all the way up to adult. I think that's very inspiring, and his work is great. American Gods and Graveyard Book are definitely two I would highly recommend, and um, yeah, they're one of my top ten for sure.

Um, right now though I'm working my way through Terry Pratchett's Tiffany Aching series, which not many people know about. Um, it's a series that were meant for younger readers as well. But again, if you know Terry Pratchett and his sense of humor, um, adults will enjoy it as well.

[Lisa] Is there anything else you'd like to share?

[Dan] Um, please check out my website. It's danomahony, all one word, dot com. I have free previews that you can either read on the browser, or on your browser, or download and take with you for all my books.

I've got a blog on there too. There's a few articles about writing. But mostly about the different Irish Celtic creatures of folklore that I play with in my stories. I research and give people more detail about those creatures and often how they affect the world of my stories as well. Uh, if you sign up for my newsletter, uh, you get some behind the scenes looks. You can also get these, uh, otherworldly adventure trading slash playing cards that I've been making. And um, you can either just collect them or make rules so you can battle them like Pokemon.

[Lisa] Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

[Dan] So the first two sets feature just Irish Celtic creatures from myth and folklore. But after that I'm going to, I want to make cards based on characters from my books.

[Lisa] I'm adding Illumina and Death's Fair Maiden to my to-be-read list. Thank you so much for listening. We hope to see you soon at McClelland Irish Library. Slan! (Bye!)