Debut novel from Alan Early

former Leitrim Guardian Literary Award winner

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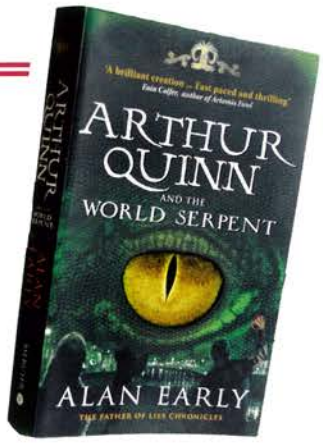

MERCIER PRESS
IRISH PUBLISHER - IRISH STORY

ALAN EARLY, son of Luke and Ann Early from Mohill has recently been published by the prestigious Mercier Press. His book Arthur Quinn and the World Serpent, is the first book of a trilogy. The story is set in Dublin and brings Viking mythology to life in the modern city. Something wicked has been awoken under the earth. When his dad is offered a job working on the new Metro tunnel, Arthur has to move with him to Dublin. While exploring the dangerous tunnel and a hidden underground river, Arthur and his new friends Will and Ash find a mysterious glowing pendent. The pendent depicts a giant Viking snake strangling the trunk of a tree. They soon work out that the pendent is a warning, a sign that something evil is waiting underneath the city. Something that's been imprisoned for a thousand years, something left by the Vikings, something that can, and will, destroy the world. What did the Vikings bury under Dublin and why did they leave it there? Who is the dark man that spies on Arthur and what is his evil plan? In the end, only Arthur and his friends can save humanity from the dreaded World Serpent.

Arthur Quinn and the World Serpent has received rave reviews and has been described as a "brilliant creation...fast paced and thrilling" by Eoin Colfer, Author of Artemis Fowl. Image Magazine called it an "exciting fantasy novel".

The book was shortlisted in the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards 2011 in the Best Children's Book, Senior section. These are very prestigious awards and being shortlisted is an amazing achievement, to do so with a debut novel is remarkable. Alan's book was in with strong competition including all the best of Irish children's writers; three-time previous IBA winner Derek Landy, hugely

bestselling authors Darren Shan, Denise Deegan and Anna Carey.

Alan started his writing career with a number of publications in the Leitrim Guardian and was a previous winner of a *Leitrim Guardian Literary Award* for his story *Ned's Game* in the 2003 edition.

As editor of this year's Leitrim Guardin, I caught up with Alan to find out more.

When and why did you begin writing? What sparked your interest initially? Did you always believe that you had a talent for writing?

I always knew I'd write a book. It was, in my mind, as inevitable as a visit to the dentist. I'd get around to it. I didn't know when. But I would get around to it.

And then, one day, last year, totally out of the blue, I got around to it. I had a story I wanted to tell, the inclination and time to write it down and the drive to pack it into several envelopes and send them to various publishing houses. I was just proud that I'd managed that. As far as I was concerned,
if this book wasn't picked up, I'd just write another one and try again. It wasn't my time yet but it would be. Eventually.

Tell me a little about your earlier writing?

I'd always written a lot; short stories growing up and then short films during my days at the National Film School. The first time something I'd written was published was a short story called 'White Fox'. I was still in school, wrote it in my scrawled handwriting and submitted a few pages to the Leitrim Guardian. They were interested enough to want to read more so my parents bought me a Brother word processor (this was pre-laptop days!) and I typed out the rest of the story. A few months later, I was thrilled to be holding the pages of that years Guardian in my hand, with my own name printed alongside my own story. From that moment on, I was hooked. I wanted to write more, tell more stories and get more works published.

You won the** Leitrim Guardian M J McManus Literary Award **in the 2003 edition of the** Leitrim Guardian **with Ned's Game. Can you tell me what you remember about winning this award? How did you feel? Was it a motivation to continue writing? You submitted and had accepted for publication two further short stories over the following two years. What bearing did the award have on your writing?

The Leitrim Guardian was always a great support and, in 2003, bestowed my short story 'Ned's Game' with the MJ McManus Literary Award. As well as the support of friends and family, having a publication like the Guardian to submit to is a massive boost for any writer's ego. It encourages you to keep going, to keep trying, to keep writing. And I did. I even wrote my first children's novel when I was sixteen (give or take). It was rambling and messy but had a few ideas I still like, including a telepathic fish. (Naturally!)

Early family Mohill Alan with brother Paul & parents Luke & Ann

When did you first consider yourself a writer?

This may all sound pig-headed or arrogant and I apologise if that's the case. But I am kind of pig-headed. I'd always wanted to be a children's writer so I knew I would be. I just wouldn't stop until I was.

But I was lucky this time. The book that would eventually be titled 'Arthur Quinn and the World Serpent' was picked up by prestigious independent publisher Mercier Press (who have, among other things, published the works of John B Keane, the best-selling autobiography of Bill Cullen and just last year launched the career of celebrity chef Donal Skehan.) Based on the rough outline for an 'Arthur Quinn' trilogy, they offered me a three-book contract. I was, obviously and in a word, thrilled!

What inspired you to write this book? How did you come up with the subject matter? Was it a sudden burst of inspiration or were you playing with and developing these characters for a long time?

The idea came out of the blue one day. I've lived in Dublin since college and one rainy Sunday, I was on the bus back to the Big Smoke. I was staring out at the drops dotting the Liffey when I remembered a documentary I'd seen not long before that. It was all about the River Poddle—which actually flows right under the city itself and into the Liffey along the quays. You can still see the tunnel where the two rivers meet. As I looked at the dark archway of the tunnel, I wondered what could be hidden down there. Could there be monsters? A Viking monster maybe? And if there was such a beast, who could stop it from destroying the city? A boy. Yes. A young boy called...Arthur Quinn.

How much research did you do for this book? What sort of preparation did you do before embarking on the character development?

I had the seed of the story and the main character now I needed to flesh it out into a full novel. I spent about six months researching and living with Arthur and his friends in my head, going over every possibility and eventuality, every plot point and plot hole. Once I was content that I had most of the bones of Arthur's world, I sat down and started the job of actually writing. I've always been quick when it comes to this so the first draft took about six weeks to complete.

What was the most challenging thing about writing this book?

Someone asked me recently if writing *'Arthur Quinn and the World Serpent'* was a daunting task. And I can honestly say that it wasn't. I knew I could finish the story—I'd written that length already years ago. But while I knew that I could finish it, I was worried that I wouldn't, that I'd lose interest or that life would get in the way, as it tends to do. Finishing the book—no matter how good or bad it was, no matter if no one ever read it, no matter if every publisher and agent refused it—was success in my mind.

Tell me about your first reviews of this book? Were you nervous about them?

My friends and family had read it. But the moment I saw a child pick it up and read it was the moment I felt like a real writer. I haven't been too nervous about reviews. Once children enjoy it—(and they certainly seem to!)—I'm pleased. That said, I've been very lucky with the reaction from critics. It's been described as 'Harry Potter, Dublin style' and Eoin Colfer, author of Artemis Fowl, called it 'a brilliant creation, fast paced and thrilling.'

This book is the first part of a three book deal, a trilogy. How daunting is that? What do you consider to be the most important support you received that allowed you complete this book? What has been the biggest influence on your writing?

The first drafts of the next two books in the series have been written. I can't wait for them to come out over the next couple years. There are some plot secrets and twists that I'm really struggling to keep to myself! This has been a very exciting time for me and without the support of my parents Luke and Ann, my brother Paul, my family and all my friends, I couldn't have done it. And, of course, it can all be traced back to seeing my story within these very pages all those years ago...

Thank you very much Alan. On behalf of all our Leitrim Guardian ***readers congratulations on your magnificent achievement and I wish you every success with this book, the rest of the trilogy and your writing career. We are truly delighted to have another of our award winners achieve such success.***

Arthur Quinn and the World Serpent is available in all good bookshops nationwide as well as online at Amazon or at Mercierpress.ie. Info, videos, games and freebies for children and fans of the book on:

www.arthurquinn.ie