

2004/May EOIN COLFER - Publishing News

Eoin Colfer is on tour, again. He was over for World Book Day, will be doing a couple more weeks in April, be away for the whole of May, with some more travelling in June, as well as putting in a couple extra weeks touring in the lead up to Christmas. Such is the life of a best-selling children's author nowadays - not quite rock'n'roll, but a far cry from the way it was before Harry and Artemis.

These two fictional boys have changed the face of publishing and, while JK Rowling has committed herself to seven Potter books, Colfer, with three Artemis Fowl titles now out, is making no promises as to how many he'll write "...I'm now finishing the fourth Artemis - *The Opal Deception*, which will publish in 2005 - and I'm giving myself a two book break from him," he says, "but I'd be reluctant to give him up completely as he's so successful...I've left it open."

Right now Colfer is more interested in talking about his latest book; *The Supernaturalist* is science fiction, not a fairy in sight, and is a darker read than Artemis, the dystopian world it takes place in almost futuristically Dickensian. "It's a very different mood, not as funny as my previous books, not so smart Alec...I wanted to write science fiction as I've always been a fan and Artemis dipped into it in a way. For me the master is William Gibson...*Neuromancer* is a great book with such a clever title and I wanted to come up with a new word that would make people wonder what it meant - mine's not as clever, but it works."

The story for *The Supernaturalist*, with its fascinating mix of spirit-sucking, ghostly Parasites and futuretech, came together very slowly, says Colfer. "I had the idea for the satellite city [where the book is set] a long time ago, then came the notion of the vigilantes - the place first, then the people who live there." Was this a different work process for him? "A different book, a different way of writing, which took longer because it's supposed to be a real future, but the detail has to be casual...once you've worked it out, though, I find it comes through in the writing without being laboured."

Talking to him, he sounds energised and enthusiastic about his new work. “I am enjoying it...I needed a break from Artemis, but I don’t know whether I’ll do another ‘dark’ book as I like the light, funnier side - unless *The Supernaturalist* gets made into a movie, and then I’ll do ten more of them!” He, like the rest of us, is still waiting to see Artemis up on the silver screen. “I don’t have anything left to sell, but nothing’s actually been made - Artemis is supposed to happen this year, but they said that last year and the year before.”

It’s been three years since Colfer went from local Irish author to worldwide celebrity, almost overnight, and he admits there was a time when it got a bit unreal “...but you have to have your real life, enjoy what you do and not worry. I used to worry about all the reviews and I found myself trying to factor in things people had said, but that doesn’t work - I know how lucky I am to be reviewed at all, but now I don’t read them, just the interviews.”

Has the fact he now has a global audience reading him affected the way he writes? “I have that audience *because* of the way I write, which is for the archetypal 12 year-old...what has changed is that I now write in a shed at the bottom of the garden - a very nice shed, a designer one, more of a cabin, really,” he replies, indicating he’s not about to change anything else. And has the move to a dedicated work environment increased his output? “No, it takes a long time to make it look like it happens very quickly...I was lucky I had half the second book written when the first came out, and also lucky I wasn’t younger - I was grounded, already married with a family.”

With celebrity comes recognition, both literary and public - is he now a ‘face’ at home? “Yes, but Wexford has quite a few famous people, like Chris de Burgh and John Banville. All I ever wanted to do was write, I didn’t expect success, just to make a living - everything that’s happened is a privilege, even the touring, which is hard work...although there’s no heavy lifting involved.”

So, what else is cooking on the Colfer stove? “I’m also working on a detective novel for the same age range I usually write for - it’s not ‘five kids and a dog’, a pastiche or a joke but a real noir detective novel with a real

story,” he replies, quoting as one of his favourite writers of the genre the Irish crime novelist Ken Bruen, author of *Rilke on Black*. “He’s very stark and brutal, but hilarious...my story’s about a kid who’s the only detective in the school because he talked his way onto an internet course and has a diploma; he charges his school mates [to find things out] and gets involved in a seemingly innocent case that turns out to be otherwise. I’m really enjoying it.”

Does he ever think what would have happened if he hadn’t sent *Artemis Fowl* to Sophie Hicks at the Ed Victor Agency? “My Irish publishers would have done their best, but the best *I* would’ve been doing is making a living - it all happened in the right place at the right time. And my brothers take all the credit!”