

BOOKS & PEOPLE

Former Derry hurler admits he kept his first novel a ‘complete secret’

By Orla Mullan | Published 14th Jul 2026, 19:30 BST

Father-of-four Réamann says he spent the last three years writing the book and much of the story came to him late at night while lying in bed



Réamann Kennedy pictured with his kids at home in Ballinascreen.
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For Réamann, his inspiration to write the book began some years ago; however it was only after taking on creative writing classes at Queens University that he decided to push forward with the idea.

“I enjoyed watching films but I was always disappointed that the films weren't better written so I had it in my head that I could write a good screenplay. But what do you do with a screenplay unless you know someone in Hollywood? So then I thought in my head, well, you're going to have to learn how to write beyond a screenplay, write the scenes that you can see but make them part of a novel,” said the Ballinascreen man.

“So then I went up to Queens and did night classes for creative writing and then when I got those behind me I sort of then realised that I could turn some of these ideas that would be a good movie into an actual novel where people can read it as if it's a movie.”

The novel is set towards the end of the Troubles, just before the IRA's first ceasefire is announced, and Conor, the protagonist, has one last mission that he's on.

When former Derry hurler Réamann Kennedy decided to channel his passion for writing into a book, he tried to keep it a secret from all those who knew him.

However, after letting a work colleague read a draft of his first novel ‘The Marksman's Gospel’, word soon got out and suddenly everyone wanted to read it.

“I was sort of embarrassed about the fact that I liked to write, so I kept it a complete secret,” said Kennedy, a Physics teacher at St Mary's Grammar School in Magherafelt.

“I let one work colleague read it and they were very positive about it and let it slip to a few more work colleagues.

“From there I gained a wee bit of confidence to sort of tell a few more people. Not many now, mostly just colleagues at work.”

The book, which is currently on sale on Amazon, began to rise in popularity following the publication of an online article.

Reviews of the book have been extremely positive with many saying they were ‘unable to put it down’.

Others have described the novel as ‘a thrilling read’ with one reviewer saying he read the entire book in a few days.

“He's a very skilled sniper and he's feeling anxious about the future, because what does he do when this war's over because this is something that he's grown to feel important? It's a big part of him to be this, you know, infamous sniper. And so the basics of it are that he readjust and he goes to St. Mary's Teaching College where he meets a Protestant girl and from there it gets a wee bit more complicated because obviously she's the only daughter of a Presbyterian minister and he's the infamous South Armagh sniper. So obviously he can't reveal that to her and the book sort of moves forward from there,” he said.

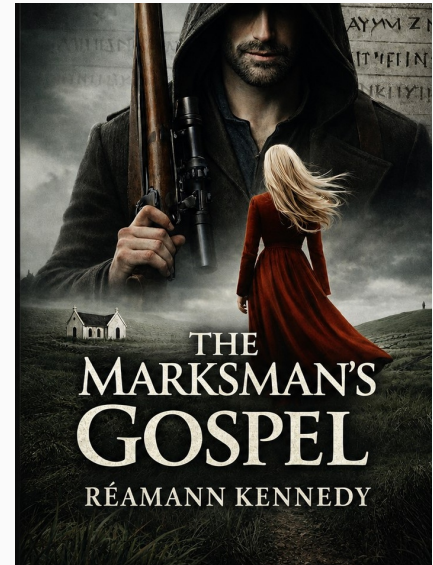
Father-of-four Réamann says he spent the last three years writing the book and much of the story came to him late at night while lying in bed.

“I'm not a brilliant sleeper so what I did was I wrote paragraphs at a time on the notes app on my phone and then emailed them to myself that night before I fell asleep. Then when I got up in the morning really early and started into paragraphs again, I would email them to my school computer,” he said.

“I have four children, so I don't eat breakfast at home as I am trying to get them out in the morning. I tried to get to school and eat breakfast at the school computer and while I was doing that, before the pupils came in, I was tidying it all up on Microsoft Word.”

Réamann, who was a prominent hurler for Derry for more than a decade and also represented his club Ballinascreen GAC, said there were times when he didn't think he would get to the finish line.

“There were times when you felt like you were standing at the very bottom of a climb. But once you got to three quarters of the way through the story, when I'd about five chapters out of 20 left, I really went for it then. You can see the finish line and it gives you that real burst.



Réamann's book is receiving excellent reviews online and from the local public. | Iconic

“I am proud of the finished product but I thought in my head, sometimes you have this feeling like, in hurling, you get that feeling that this is hitting the centre spot here. This is actually quite good.

“But you doubt yourself and that someone else mightn't think that and because I'm not an established author, I'm saying maybe it's only in your head that this is good.

“Then the feedback gradually came but I was suspicious. Is this person just telling me this because they're my friend? Or is it actually good? So I still didn't want it to go to the public until I got quite a bit of feedback. Some of my best friends have only found out yesterday that I wrote a book. My mother only found out yesterday when she was in the butchers. I kept this all a secret, especially to my closest friends and my family,” he said.

The book retails on Amazon for £9.99 (paperback), £2.99 on Kindle or free on Kindle Unlimited.

The book was self published though Amazon and Réamann said he wanted it to have a ‘spiritual dimension’.

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“There's people in this parish and other parishes, you know, there's been suicides and things and I have it in my head that our generation don't really have the same spiritual connection as a previous generation. So when hard times come, they maybe don't have the same trust to go down to the chapel, light a candle, feel a bit lighter.”

Réamann has plans for a trilogy and has already begun writing the second book in the series.

“About six months ago, I was a third of the way through the second book and then I just ran out of steam for enthusiasm. I know what I want to write, but I didn't have the enthusiasm to type a single thing. And I just stopped. It's not writer's block, because I know the story I want. It's just the writer's laziness. I just cannot get enthused to type. So basically, I decided to tidy up the first book, get it out there and if

the feedback's good, maybe that'll put a wee bit of energy in me to finish the second book.”

Réamann says he can't believe the support he has received following the publication of the book.

“I love hearing feedback if someone has read it. A woman pulled into the car park when I was dropping the kid off at football the other day and she opened the door and got out and was really giving me so much praise about how entertaining the book was. She said she went to read it at 11 o'clock in the morning, and she didn't do a thing until 11 o'clock at night, because she had the whole thing read,” he said.

“The feedback from Ballinascreen folk has been phenomenal. I'm going to training and people are beeping horns and holding the book out the window. I was sort of thinking I'd be laughed out of town but they are actually so generous of spirit and it's great to see.”