

# Winter Wonders

C.E. Murphy is an Alaskan-born fantasy author who currently lives in Ireland. **Tammy Moore** caught up with her recently.

It's easy to see why Murphy's friends describe her as "...a thin veneer over a woman who is constantly moving and shaking..." The rate at which she writes is impressive, as are the books themselves - which doesn't seem entirely fair. They are also inventive and varied, with Murphy running three separate worlds that were each unique in and of themselves. In the *Walker* series she blended Native American and Celtic mythologies to create Joanne Walker, shaman and car mechanic; the *Negotiator* trilogy created a secret world inhabited by the 'Old Races', into which a practical lawyer was thrown through no fault of her own. Meanwhile, the *Inheritors'* trilogy is a lush dip into a fantasy world that draws strongly on the politics and personalities of the Elizabethan era, if the Elizabethan era had.... Well, you should read it for yourself.

## TM:

First of all, how do you like Ireland after living in Alaska? Do you think growing up in Alaska or living in Ireland now has helped shape your writing in any way?

## CM:

You know, people've asked the "how has living here (or there) shaped your writing" question before, and I can't help thinking I'm not a good person to actually answer that. It's a little like asking a fish how living in water is, maybe. I'm sure growing up in Alaska had some kind of effect on me as a writer, but I can't really recognize what it is. There's got to be a good answer to the question, but I haven't figured it out yet.

I had a friend tell me, when I was moving to Ireland, that I was not allowed to suddenly become a Celtophile in all my writing. Then she paused and said, "Of course, there's a lot of Irish mythology in your stuff already..." So I'm not sure living here has wildly affected what I'm doing, though I've learned things like the Irish people call the Irish language "Irish" instead of "Gaelic", so, y'know, there's a hint more authenticity in what I'm writing, I guess.

And Ireland's a wonderful country. Living here's been an adventure. It's a very different place from Alaska, but I gotta say--the concerts are much better over here!

## TM:

What happens to Belinda in the second instalment of the *Inheritors'* trilogy? Kidding! I'll wait for the book, but I was wondering how you plot. Do you know what the entire story is going to be across the arc of the books or do you write by the seat of your pants?

## CM:

I'm not going to tell you! You have to read and find out! I promise that there will be more sex,



murder and betrayal in the second book, but I bet you'd have guessed that already...

I synopsize my books when I sell them, so I usually have at least some idea of how the story goes, and some idea of how the whole series goes, in case of something like *The Inheritors' Cycle* or the *Walker Papers* (which will hopefully be nine books long), I know roughly what happens in each of the books leading up to the last one. But I don't know the details. My husband says I write books to find out what happens, which is mostly true. I have the big picture, but I don't know quite exactly how I'm supposed to get to the end, so I have to write it to find out (my mother always says "writers are weird" when I say things like that).

## TM:

Which of your books has been your favourite to write, the one that you had the most fun with, and why?

## CM:

Ah, well, my favorite book hasn't yet been published, or even sold. It's a Young Adult fantasy novel and I love it beyond reason, but I've been too busy with paying work the last several years to revise it and get it out to try to sell it. That particular book is - I cringe at the phrase, but it's true - the book of my heart. I'd been trying to write it since I was 12, and about six years ago in a fit of inspiration I wrote the whole thing during NaNoWriMo, and I think it's the best thing I've ever written. But nobody's read it yet!

## TM:

You've attended a number of Fantasy conventions this year. How do you think the S/F scene in Ireland differs to the S/F scene in North America? (I'll not ask which you prefer - I think it's obvious \*buffs nails\*)

## CM:

I've primarily gone to larger conventions in the States, so my impression is kind of that the Irish affairs are more intimate. At this point I know a fair number of the SF/F crowd in the RoI, at least, and a

recognizable number from the North, and there's just no way you could say that about any of the North American cons I've gone to. But at the end of the day we're all geeks, and we're all attending these things because of a love affair we've got in common, so I think whether in Ireland or in the States our hearts are all in the same places. (...which is to say, at the bar.)

## TM:

If you could give one piece of advice to an aspiring author, what would it be?

## CM:

Years and years ago, Anne McCaffrey said to me, "If you can do anything else, do it", and it wasn't until my first book got published that I really understood what she meant. Because, I mean, obviously, I could do other things. I did web design for a long time. I did all the usual oddball jobs writers seem to list in their biographies. I could do other things, and so I thought that was a really weird thing for her to say.

But while I was doing all those other things, I kept writing. I wrote my first book when I was 19, my second when I was about 25, and I'd written seven or so before *Urban Shaman*, which was my fifth manuscript, got published. I would still be writing today, whether I was getting paid for it or not. I cannot, it turns out, not write. Writing is not an easy way to make a living. It's hard to break in, it's hard to stay in, and it doesn't pay very well. You're at the whim of the market and of cover artists and a million things you can't control. It is, in fact, a really stupid way to make a living, and pretty much every working writer I know agrees with that.

But my God, it's the best job in the world, and if you can't not write, then my real piece of advice is this: Never give up, never surrender - because it is so very worth it. If writing drives you, then don't ever let anybody tell you you're wasting your time, and don't ever give up faith in yourself.

## Going for Gold

A candid account of her life, by one of Ireland's greatest sporting heroes, says **Cathal Coyle**.



### Sonia: My Story

by Sonia O'Sullivan and Tom Humphries  
(Penguin)

Sonia O'Sullivan is one of the greatest sporting figures Ireland has ever produced. This biography is co-written by Tom Humphries, one of Ireland's foremost sports journalists, and takes the reader behind the scenes of a brilliant yet vulnerable sportswoman.

Sonia first came to prominence when she was unlucky to finish 4th in the 3000 metres final in Barcelona in 1992. Leading the field with 100 metres to go her inexperience cost her an early gold medal, and while she bemoaned that 'fourth is a footnote', it kick-started her career.

There's a close resemblance in her attitude towards authority with that other great Corkonian, Roy Keane. When Sonia complained about the Irish Athletics governing body and its less than professional treatment and approach concerning its athletes, she admitted to feeling 'outside the loop' from the outset. This had uncanny similarities with Keane's infamous tirade against Mick McCarthy and the FAI in Saipan.

While the pinnacle of Sonia's achievements were the World Championship 5000 metres gold and silver medal for the same event in the Olympic Games in Sydney; it was ironically the wretched exit from the 1996 Atlanta Olympics final that almost became her career-defining moment. O'Sullivan admitted that even though she bitterly regretted missing out on Sydney gold by a narrow margin to Gabriela Szabo and that it was her greatest disappointment, plummeting to the depths of despair following Atlanta only served to increase her drive and focus.

The memoirs from the pre-Sydney period offer inspiration for the reader, and prove the old adage true; what doesn't break you can give you strength. O'Sullivan's ultimate achievement was overcoming serious injuries and added responsibilities of parenthood to prove that she was a top-quality athlete, as the wish to avoid becoming a member of the 'unfulfilled athlete' club drove her on. The candid nature of the book alone makes it a must-read for any Irish sports buff!