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Author/Interview subject: Ross MacKenzie (RM)

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)

Other speakers: Audience (Aud)

JF Hi there, I’m Janice Forsyth. A very, very warm welcome indeed to Authors Live. How the heck are you? Hope that you're all extremely well wherever you are watching. Now, of course, things are a wee bit different at the moment, so we don't have a live audience with us here at Pacific Quay in Glasgow. But I do know that lots and lots of you are watching in classrooms all over the country. So thank you very much indeed, how are you, yeah, give us a wave. Yeah, I can almost see you doing that, brilliant, fantastic. And in fact, as well as me imagining your wave, some of you have also sent us a lovely wave.

Aud Hello.

JF Absolutely brilliant, fantastic, what a lovely wave, thank you so much. Well of course, as you can imagine, I don't know if you’ve missed us, but we have really missed all of you, so it's just brilliant to be back. I hope you're all okay, doing well. We’re really excited, and particularly as we’re back with a new series, and really putting the spotlight on home-grown Scottish talent, it's fantastic. Ross McKenzie is a multi-award winning author, from Renfrew, which is really not far at all from where we are, talking to you right now, in Glasgow. He's a fantastic storyteller, he tells wonderful tales. Magical worlds, is what he really specialises in creating, magical worlds that we can all get lost in, which is a wonderful thing to do. Ross has written three books about this very, very magical place, which I'm sure you're familiar with, called, The Nowhere Emporium. So I think, as soon as you hear that you're thinking, what is that all about, I want to go there, and you probably have done.

 So, Ross is here today to tell us about the final instalment in The Nowhere Emporium trilogy, a new novel called, The Otherwhere Emporium. So you can send your questions in, we always love to hear from you, go on, get it done if you haven’t done it already. You can use Twitter, if your class has a Twitter handle, you can use #bbcauthorslive. Altogether now…that’s it, #bbcauthorslive. And I'll put as many of those questions to Ross, as I can, in today’s event. So, Ross, da-da-da-da, welcome to Authors Live, how are you?

RM Thank you, I'm very well, Janice, thanks for having me on.

JF Really good to have you here. And tell us a little bit about how things have been for you. It's a funny time for authors, and for schools. Schools are back, now, but you know…

RM Yeah.

JF …you would be normally out, doing your bit, talking to schools, and kids, and so on.

RM Yeah, I'd usually be out all over the place, talking to classes all over the country. But unfortunately, it hasn’t been able to happen over the last few months, but hopefully we’re getting some way back into that now, yeah.

JF Yeah, yeah.

RM I've missed it.

JF Oh, I bet you have. And I know that lots of writers and lots of people looing will be like, oh I don't know if I feel like writing, especially when we were really in a kind of lockdown situation. How was that for you?

RM It was, I won't lie, it was tricky at some parts. I have two little girls, Lena and Molly, back at home, and with them not being at school, and my wife doing a degree, it was busy. So there were days where I struggled, I have to admit, but writing doesn’t feel like work for me, it feels like playing, really.

JF Oh, that’s great, what a brilliant thing to do. You’ve got a big smile on your face, even thinking about it. So just, very briefly, then, little bit of scene-setting, there might be some people watching who don't know the book. So just tell us, in a nutshell, what is The Nowhere Emporium?

RM Okay, well the bones of it is that The Nowhere Emporium is a magic shop. So if you can imagine, wherever you live, there's probably a high street, or a row of shops near your house that you maybe frequent. And walking past that one day, and there's an extra shop there, and it's not that one of the other shops has closed and something else has opened in its place, it's that there's an actual shop, has physically, magically, squeezed its way into this row. And this shop is filled with wonders, it's a labyrinth of doorways and hallways and stairways. And behind every door there's a different wonder. So for instance, there's a room where you can fly through the night sky, there's a room where you can leave your deepest, darkest secret and no one will ever find out. Anything you can imagine happens in this shop.

JF No wonder these books are popular, Ross, that’s all I'm saying. Well actually, throughout Authors Live this morning, we will have questions, which have been specially filmed. So we don't have an audience here, but we have questions from children all over the country. And they’ve been filmed and sent in by pupils at Aith Junior High in Shetland, and St James Primary in Ross’ home patch of Renfrew.

RM Yeah.

JF So we've got the first question for you now.

Boy Hello, my name is Oliver, and I'm from Aith Junior High School. My question is, did anyone encourage you to write books?

JF That’s such a good question, Ross.

RM It is, it is.

JF Was there somebody in particular that sparked it off for you?

RM There was, actually, Oliver. It was a teacher in P5 called Miss MacLean, who read us a book you may have heard of, called The Witches by Roald Dahl. And for me, that really lit the fire under me, I wanted to make people feel how I had just felt when I read The Witches. And Miss MacLean really encouraged me to write. So yeah, that’s where it all began for me.

JF Let's hear it for the teachers, yay, fantastic, it's always good to hear that, and it's such a common story, teachers are so blooming important. And I'm not just saying that because there are teachers watching right now. So I'm going to hand over to you, then, to tell us a little bit more about this very magical place.

RM Yes, I've been looking forward to this. So, The Nowhere Emporium, yeah, as I said to Janice earlier on, The Nowhere Emporium is a magical shop. Now, one of the things that I'm asked as a writer, frequently, when I go out to schools is, where do your ideas come from. And that’s a really difficult question to answer, I wish I knew. Well, it's kind of double-sided, I wish I knew, but also, I'm quite happy not to know. Because if I found out, I'm worried that the ideas might stop coming, one day. So, the idea for The Emporium just appeared out of nowhere one day, nowhere, The Nowhere Emporium. And like I said, it was almost as if I was walking down Renfrew High Street and I'd noticed this new shop had appeared. And I think the best way to, you know, to flesh out an idea is to ask questions about it.

 So I asked, well how did this shop get here, how did it get to the High Street. And so the answer was quite obviously magic, it was magical. So the owner of the shop must be a magician, then, obviously, yes. And that led to another question, so how does he move the shop around. And what is in this shop. So in my mind, I sort of pushed through the front door of this shop, and I found this dark, dusty old sort of cavern of wonders, full of trinkets and toys, and coats of armour, and rusted swords, and shields, and stuffed animals, and all sorts of things. In my mind, I could wander around this place all day, and never grow tired of picking things up and wondering where they came from, and what their story might be. But that’s not the coolest part of the shop. The best part of the shop is what lies behind the curtain at the back of the shop, behind the owner’s table.

 There's a curtain the colour of blood, and if you walk through that curtain you will find a labyrinth of stairways, passageways, hallways, all lined with an uncountable number of doors, infinite doors. And behind each of these doors is a wonder. So the owner of this shop is called Lucien Silver, and Lucien Silver is one of the world’s most powerful magicians. Lucien Silver creates the wonders within The Emporium, and he travels from town to town, from city to city, from country to country, and through time. And everywhere he goes, he has a grand opening night, and people are drawn to The Nowhere Emporium, because they want to know what is inside these amazing rooms. And he says, come on in, have a look around, but there's a price to pay for entering The Nowhere Emporium. It's not what you would imagine, it's not money, you don't hand over £5 or maybe £10 to Mr Silver, you hand over a piece of your imagination. And he then uses that imagination to power the shop, to make it travel to the next place, so imagination is fuel for The Emporium.

 And Mr Silver, the way it works is, he has created his most ingenious piece of magic, it's something called the Book of Wonders. And how it works is this. Anytime Mr Silver wants a new room to appear in his shop, anytime he has a new idea, he takes his Book of Wonders, this battered, old leather book, and he opens to a blank page. Now, there are infinite pages in this book, and he writes down exactly what he wants to appear. And as soon as he is finished writing, as soon as he closes that book, whatever he has written in those pages, appears as a room somewhere in The Nowhere Emporium. Now, can you imagine having that power, can you imagine having one of those books, where anything in the world could be yours. It's at your fingertips with the stroke of a pen. That is the power that Mr Silver has, because of the Book of Wonders. And that’s how The Emporium works, that’s how it moves from place to place.

 So The Emporium is, it runs on imagination. It runs on a magic, which flows from imagination. And Mr Silver, one day, takes his Emporium to Glasgow, and that’s where our story starts. We have an orphan from Glasgow called Daniel. And at the beginning of the book, Daniel is not really having a great time of it, Daniel is being bullied by a guy called Spud, Spud Harper. And one day, Daniel is running through the streets of Glasgow to get away from Spud and his gang, and he darts into the first shop that he can find, that’s open, and of course, it happens to be The Nowhere Emporium. And Mr Silver is behind his desk, and Daniel meets Mr Silver, and Mr Silver, being a powerful magician, he can tell when he is in the presence of someone else who can use magic, and he senses this in Daniel. And he asks Daniel what Daniel thinks is quite a strange question. He says, Daniel, what’s your favourite animal, and Daniel thinks about it a little bit and he says, I quite like magpies.

 And so Mr Silver clicks his fingers, and two silver magpies appear, out of nowhere. And they fly around the shop, and then they crash into this red curtain at the back of the shop, and explode in a shower of rubies, and Daniel not knowing what’s going on, kind of freaks out a little bit and runs out of the shop. Now, what I forgot to tell you is, if you visit The Emporium, no matter what you see inside, no matter what wonders you experience, whether you fly through the night sky, or whether you go to the moon and back, as soon as you step out of that shop, you forget everything. For you, The Emporium no longer exists. You know something’s happened. The way I explain it is, have you ever had a dream, have you ever woke up in the morning and you know you’ve had a dream, but you can't quite remember what that dream was. And the more you grasp onto that dream, the more it sort of escapes you, like sand through your fingers. That’s how it feels upon leaving The Emporium, you know something has happened, you know something has changed inside you, but you don't know exactly what.

 And so that’s how The Emporium works. Daniel is the only person in the entire history of the world, who experiences The Emporium, and who can remember it upon leaving. So Daniel becomes The Emporium’s very first returning customer. And Mr Silver thinks, hang on a minute, this has never happened before. And he offers Daniel the chance of a lifetime, the chance to become his apprentice, to learn all the secrets of The Emporium. To travel through time and space, and visit all periods and places in history, and more importantly, how to write in the Book of Wonders, and create his own book.

JF Wow, I mean, even in just that short introduction, you’ve taken us, you’ve taken me to that other place. And I love that idea of, because I know that many of the children watching today, will be writing their own stories.

RM Yeah.

JF And I think that’s just such a wonderful, immediate brilliant tip, which is, just ask questions. How lovely that, by you asking questions after that first lightbulb idea, about the shop, you then create your storyline, and the characters come into it.

RM Yeah, exactly, that’s just now my brain works, I suppose, that’s my golden writing tip, whenever I go round schools, I say, if anyone is ever staring at a blank piece of paper, and they are, they have a block, they think, what on earth am I going to write about, just ask questions. You know, what if, is the best question in the world, what if can lead you anywhere.

JF Love that.

RM So that’s my tip.

JF I love that. So talking of questions, we are going to hear from various children throughout today, with our special filmed questions. And you’ve just talked there of course about Mr Silver’s Book of Wonders. So let's go to our next question.

Girl Hi, I'm Reeta.

Girl And I'm Ailidh.

Girl And we’re from Aith Junior High School, and this is our question. How do you feel when you write a book?

Girl And how do you feel when you're finished writing a book?

JF Excellent. Don't you love a double question, two in one.

RM I love a double question, that was two for the price of one, absolutely. Good questions.

JF Yeah.

RM So, how do you feel when you write a book, hmm. I would say, so, all you guys out there will have something that you love to do more than anything, whether that’s play football, or dance, or swim, something that makes you feel really free and alive, and just something where you could do it forever, and never grow tired of it. That’s how I feel when I write. Writing, for me, doesn’t feel like work, writing feels like having fun. And I think that’s really one of the secrets of life, you know, if you can find a job that you love, it never really feels like you're working, does it, it feels like you're being paid to have fun. And that’s how I feel when I write. And the writing process for me is, really, it is playing, it is having fun, it's letting my imagination run riot. Especially with The Emporium books, it's all about imagination, it's all about just wondering, and asking those questions, what if this happened, or where could we go next.

 And it's kind of like, I heard a really famous author, Stephen King, one time, saying that, when he writes, it's almost like driving in the fog. He doesn’t plan out his books, you know, like watercolour paintings, like painting by numbers, he doesn’t know exactly where he's going. And neither do I, I like to, it's almost like walking or driving in really thick fog. I like to be able to see just far enough ahead of me, that I know where I'm going, but I like there to be surprises up ahead. So for me, the process of writing is an adventure in itself. And of course, it's not just about writing the books, it's not just about the process of writing, it's about everything that comes after. It's about doing amazing stuff like this today, it's about coming out and seeing you guys in school, and doing festivals, like the Edinburgh Festival, and the Hay Festival, and Wigton, and all those amazing places where writers and readers kind of come together, and discuss books, and their love of books, and their joy of reading, and adventures, and characters, and all that amazing stuff.

 So it isn't just about the writing of the book, it's about the whole adventure of being an author that I love, I love every single part of it. I love coming out to visit you guys, I love answering your questions. And I have seen so, so many of your own wonders, your own creative writing. Every single week, every day, I have emails and tweets, and all sorts of things, from teachers, and from readers showing me the work that you guys have done, based around The Emporium. I've seen you creating your own wonders in shoe boxes, I've seen a wishing tree where anything that you wish for, you pick an apple down, and you take a bite, and you make a wish, and it's come true. I've seen a room someone made up where you can see relatives that have passed away. I've seen rooms where you have the comical side of things as well, where one pupil created a room where his little brother was less annoying, which I thought was a nice touch. There's all these amazing things, and your imagination is always far, far more enchanting to me than anything that I could come up with.

 So, being a writer is, it's, I relish it, and it's a privileged position, and I love, not just writing the books, but everything that goes along with it. I've been on Blue Peter, I've won the Blue Peter Book Award. I have got a Blue Peter Badge, final, at the age of 37, I got a Blue Peter Badge. I, you know, have been at Scottish Children Book Awards, I've done all sorts of things. So if you're really lucky, if you're a writer, amazing things can happen for you. Being a writer has totally changed my life, absolutely.

JF Yeah. And I was going to say to you, as well as, so you have people who are actually writers, and they make their living, and it's a proper job. But at the same time, for lots of people watching, they may have got that writing bug that you’ve talked about, and maybe been inspired by your books amongst others. As you say, their imagination goes to places that yours hadn’t gone.

RM Exactly.

JF But there's also, it doesn’t just have to be a job, it could be something that you just enjoy doing in your life.

RM Oh, yeah.

JF Whether you're a school pupil watching now, or as you get older, it might be something that you turn to and do, without having books published. Is that, that’s true, isn't it?

RM That’s absolutely true. Probably the majority of people out there who write don't publish, they just do it for the love of writing. And I would totally encourage anyone out there who's watching, who fancies being a writer, or enjoys writing, there's no pressure involved, just write your stories, just tell your stories, and enjoy the process of writing. Because writing can be a friend when you need one, if that makes sense, your characters can be friends, just as books can be friends. When I was growing up there were times when I felt lonely, and you know, characters in my favourite books were like friends to me. So writing and reading can be, you know, it's an experience, it's not just something that you think of, okay, I'm going to be a writer, that’s my job. Do it for the love of writing. I tell stories because it's in my blood, and these stories have to get out. And it's just a bonus that it's a job for me, too.

JF And also, over the years that we've done Authors Live, talking to a lot of authors, often they say, if you are interested in writing, not only do it, as you say, you’ve got the blank page, and then ask questions. But also, read as much as possible, seems to be something that so many writers say. What do you think of that?

RM Read as much as possible, is another one, the sort of top tips to become a writer. I mean, it's like anything, if you want to be a footballer, you have to put the practice in. If you want to be a chef, or a lawyer, you have to learn how to do that. And being a writer is no different, and there is no better way of learning how to be a writer, than reading the best writers out there. Because reading is a way of learning without even realising it, without even realising it. And writing, as well, write as much as you possibly can. I mean, like I said, writing is not, it doesn’t feel like a job to me. And that sort of gets back to the second part of that question there, you know, how do you feel when you finish a book.

JF Yeah.

RM And usually, when I finish a book, it's a feeling of, kind of, joy, and a feeling that you've accomplished something. And looking forward to all the stuff that comes next, the book launch, and all the visits that I've been talking about coming out to speak to you guys, and getting your opinion on the book. Which is often quite scary, but it's brilliant as well. This time it was a little bit different, because I'm wrapping up a series, so I've never done that before, I'm sort of saying goodbye to Daniel, and Ellie, and Mr Silver, and all these characters who I have come to, they’ve come to be almost like friends to me over the last seven or eight years of writing about them. So it's a little bit bittersweet, I would say, it's one of those things that, I'm very proud of The Emporium, and the trilogy, but I am also sad to be saying goodbye to it.

JF Oh, I don't want you to shed a tear and start crying just now.

RM I'll try and hold it.

JF Because there's something I want you to do. Because you've talked so brilliantly about the world you’ve created, and now you're actually going to give us a flavour of it, aren’t you, you're going to give a reading?

RM It would be my pleasure, yes, absolutely.

JF Brilliant.

RM Yeah, okay doke.

JF Thank you very much indeed.

RM Here we go. So this is from Chapter Six of the book, which is called, The White Feather. So this is in Elmbank, near Glasgow, present day.

 Mirren continued to stare at the strange caller ID flashing on the screen of her phone. It read, Nowhere. Was this a prank call? She tried letting it ring until the caller either hung up, or the answerphone kicked in. Neither of those things happened. After a few minutes, the phone was still ringing, and vibrating, even after she tried switching it off. Seemingly, with no other choice, Mirren Feather put the phone to her ear, and answered the call. Hello – a pause – the line was bad. Hello, Mirren repeated. Another pause, and the hiss of faraway static. Then someone answered. Mirren, said a male voice. Mirren sat up straight, who's this. I don't have time to explain everything, said the voice, you just listen carefully, your Mum is in trouble. A jolt of panic.

 Mirren swung her legs around, sat on the edge of her bed, in the soft, turquoise glow of the nightlight. What’s happened to Mum, has there been an accident at work? The line crackled and hissed. She's not at work, Mirren, she's somewhere else, she's trapped in my shop, and she needs your help, I need your help. Mirren stood up, began to pace around the room. What do you mean, stuck in your shop, where is she, what’s happened to her? He's going to cut me off soon, said the voice, hurriedly, I might go at any moment. Mirren, this is going to sound mad, but please believe me when I tell you, every word I'm about to say is the absolute truth. I'm a magician, a good magician, my shop, The Nowhere Emporium, has been taken over by an evil magician. He's keeping your Mum prisoner. Mirren held the phone away from her face, stared at the screen in disbelief. Then a thought occurred to her.

 Oh very funny, Lucas, you got me. Another pause, the line crackled. Lucas, said the voice, no this isn't Lucas. This isn't funny Luke, Mirren’s fear was beginning to turn to anger. I know I should have stuck up for you yesterday at lunch, I'm sorry, but that doesn’t mean you can phone me in the middle of the night and frighten the life out of me, honestly, telling me Mum’s in danger. I'm not Lucas, the voice pleaded, please just look out of your window, Mirren, please. She heard the fear, the desperation in the voice, and she knew she wasn’t speaking to Lucas. Her heart was battering against her chest, she stared at her phone until a sound from the window made her look up, a whispering, scratching noise. Feeling like she was in a dream, Mirren crept to the window. She opened the curtains to the still darkness of the night. A single white feather was floating on the other side of the glass, suspended in the air, twirling. It's hollow shaft gently scratching at the glass.

 At first, Mirren did nothing but stare at the feather, watching it catch the cold glow of the streetlamps. Then she remembered the phone in her hand. Who are you, she whispered. My name is Daniel Holmes, came the voice, through the hiss of static. Am I dreaming, Daniel Holmes? No, Mirren. So what you said about Mum, about her being in trouble – it's true, Mirren, she needs your help, we need your help. Mirren’s throat was tight, who is we? My shop, Mirren, The Nowhere Emporium, and everyone in it. It's a place filled with brilliant magic, but that magic can be dangerous if it's in the wrong hands. But what does any of this have to do with my Mum, with me? The line hissed and whistled. Trapped inside the shop. A moment of silence. He's almost here, he knows where I am, please Mirren, come to The Nowhere Emporium, find your Mum, follow the feather, and trust the sign of the book. Please hurry… The line went dead.

JF Ooh. I'm going to clap, yay. I'm pretending there's a bit audience here. And you're clapping wherever you are watching and listening, I'm sure. That was great. You can't leave it there…oh, you will for the time being. But that’s a brilliant example of what you do, it's that spinning a story. I was caught in that moment, absolutely, I was imagining, I could see it, you could see the pictures of the call, and the static, and all the rest of it, and the line going dead. Oh, I'll have to keep reading. So, Scottish names, and Scotland is very much at the heart of this book.

RM Yes.

JF You are Scottish, in case no one’s noticed.

RM Uh-huh, very much so.

JF Yeah, I'm very observant. Was it always a given for you, then, did you think, right I'm going to write books and I want Scotland to be at the heart of it. Or once you started thinking about the stories you were weaving, and the questions you were asking, the magical atmosphere, did Scotland seem like the perfect setting?

RM I think, I didn’t set out to write a book set in Scotland, if that makes sense. It just sort of, there's that old sort of cliché, write about what you know.

JF Sure.

RM And I think, with The Emporium, you know, I wanted, Glasgow is a brilliant city to start off in, because it's a beautiful city, you know, it's very different from Edinburgh, but it's still a beautiful city. And it's got that hustle and bustle, and it's a little bit different, a lot of books are set in London, which is amazing, an amazing city also. But I just wanted it to be, you know, to ring sort of true to that Scottishness. And it sort of happened naturally, I didn’t think about it, if that makes sense.

JF Yeah. But that’s lovely, I think, because what you're doing is a flight of the imagination, into another world, but at the same time you can have fun referring to, you know, places that you know, and that must supply a degree of comfort while you're flying off into the unknown.

RM Yes, absolutely. And I love imagining, I love books that happen in the shadows of our world. I love books that happen in fantasy worlds, also, but books that could be happening on our world, in the dark, shadowy places, and we just don't know about it.

JF Yeah, yeah.

RM That’s what really, that’s what I love.

JF Do you fancy another question from a pupil?

RM Oh yeah, absolutely.

JF Okay, let us go to another of our special filmed questions.

Girl Hi, my name’s Karly, and I'm from St James Primary. And I would like to know what inspired you to continue making The Nowhere Emporium series?

JF Oh, great question, thank you. These are really interesting questions.

RM They are, they’ve really thought about these.

JF What inspired you to…go on, tell.

RM So after the first book, what inspired me to keep going? I think it sort of goes back to what we spoke about earlier. When you’re writing a book, the characters almost become like friends. And I wanted to know what happened to these people next. I suppose it's like, when you read a book, and you know, whether it be the Harry Potter series, which I love, I'm a total Harry Potter fan boy. Or any sort of series that you get into, you want to know what happens to these characters, you think about them after you’ve closed that last page. If the writer has done their job properly, then you will care about that character, or those characters, and you will want to know what happened. And it's no different being the writer, because those characters live up here. So, the stories were continuing in my head, and I suppose just wanted to get out, and that’s why I continued telling them. Really good question.

JF I love this, because it's like your job, but at the heart of it is kind of magic. Because what you're doing is making these stories come to life. Let's have another question, actually, because we've got these brilliant questions on film. So let us go to our next one, now.

Girl Hi, my name is Heidi, I come from Aith Junior High School. And my question is, as the books are a trilogy, did they get easier or more difficult to write each time?

JF She wants my job, doesn’t she?

RM Yeah, I think she does.

JF What a brilliant question, fantastic question there from Heidi, thank you very much indeed. So, what do you think, what’s the answer?

RM The answer to, do the books get easier to write as you go? You would think they would, wouldn’t you, like you would think they get easier the more you do it. But I suppose it gets easier in the aspect that, you know the characters, and you know what they would do in any given situation. Because this might sound strange, but being an author, your characters sort of come alive, and sometimes they do things that surprise you. Which might not make much sense to someone who doesn’t write, because you're thinking, well the characters are in your head, so how can they surprise you. But sometimes, something will just spill out onto the page, and it will take the book in a totally different turn. So every page is an adventure. And in that way it got easier, because I knew the characters.

JF Yeah.

RM But it got more difficult in terms of, the more popular The Emporium became, the more the pressure was to make the next book as good as I could possibly make it. And sort of live up to the expectation of the people out there who wanted to read the next ones. So it was a balancing act, it some ways it got easier…I know that’s kind of sitting on the fence answer. But in some ways it was easier, and in other ways there was a little bit more pressure on me, if that makes sense.

JF No, it does, it makes total sense, it really does. And as I say, I love the fact, because some people might say, oh magic, I don't believe in magic. But actually, what you are doing is that, you know, the beauty of the human imagination, it is something rather magical and mysterious.

RM It is, there's absolutely something magical about it. And writing connects people, you know, in a way that nothing else does, no other medium does it that way.

JF Well, through the medium and the magic of the internet, I've got some questions that have come in from people who are watching. So this is from P6 Forth Hill Primary, Broughty Ferry. Hello. Love Broughty Ferry. Here we go. Ross, if you could take…oh, this is like three things in one. If you could take three books to a desert island, what would they be?

RM Oh my goodness.

JF Three books.

RM If I could take three books…should we do children’s books, shall we do books for young readers?

JF Yeah, do children’s books.

RM Okay. Okay, well, can I cheat, does the Harry Potter series count as one book?

JF You can do what you like.

RM Can I do what I like, okay.

JF You can do what you like.

RM I would take the Harry Potter series, right. I would take the first, I would take Northern Lights by Philip Pullman. And I would take…oh my goodness.

JF One of your own?

RM No, no. I would have to probably take The Witches by Roald Dahl, because that was the book that started it all off for me.

JF Yeah.

RM And I've read that with my girls, I have two little girls, and I read that with them. And when I was reading it, I felt like I was nine years old again, when I was in those pages.

JF How lovely.

RM So I would take that one with me.

JF Well done, because these are questions coming in, we haven’t told you about. And that’s Forth Hill – my eyesight is not – Forth Hill Primary, Broughty Ferry. Right, here we go, just some people who have said, hello, using the #bbcauthorslive. So we could wave at various cameras. Willow, Poplar, and Sycamore classes at Duke Street Primary in Glasgow, hello, thank you for watching.

RM Hello.

JF Room Six at Heathery Know Primary – what a lovely name – Heathery Know Primary, and St Mary’s in Hamilton, thank you very much for being in touch. I'm going to give you another question.

RM Fire away.

JF Because this is the most important aspect, it's not my questions. P7, I think, Miss Rimmer’s class. How would you design The Nowhere Emporium movie set?

RM Oh, wow.

JF So, Steven Spielberg’s paid the big money for it.

RM Yeah. Obviously, it's got to be a Spielberg production.

JF Do whatever you like.

RM Yeah, oh my goodness. Well it would have to be, we'd have to start with book one. So the shop itself would be like an old junk shop, but I would just take great delight in filling it with little oddities, and knick-knacks, because all the little details that are in there. There are, like, you know, there's jewellery, there's toys, there's everything you could possibly imagine. You imagine walking into the most fascinating junk shop you’ve ever been in, in your life, and everything you see you want to pick up and hold, and wonder where it came from. So that would be, the wonders themselves, would be amazing, you know. That, the thing that holds the most sort of appeal for me is just going into that…

JF All that, yeah.

RM …first taste of the shop, you know, and the smell of the polish, and the dust, and all that sort of stuff, and the age. And all the stories whispering in the air of all these objects that are there, that’s what I would sort of…

JF Wonderful. As soon as we finish this, I'll phone my pal, Stevie Spielberg, if you want.

RM Oh, that would be great, yeah.

JF We’ll get it sorted.

RM Get him on the phone.

JF Let's go to another of our excellent filmed questions for you, Ross.

Girl Hi, my name is Mia, and I would like to know where you get your ideas for your books?

JF There you go, Mia’s question, and I'm sure that’s one you’ve been asked a lot of times, where you get your ideas from?

RM That’s the question that strikes fear into every author. Because there's not really an easy answer to that. I wish there was some exciting answer, like a burn a candle at midnight, and see an enchantment, and an elf comes to the door and drops an idea off. But it's not like that.

JF What a shame.

RM I know, it would be great if it was. But I don't really know where they come from. All I can say is, when an idea does pop into my head, is that, I flesh it out by asking those questions that we spoke about earlier on. So the ideas, I have no idea where they come from, I don't really want to think about it too much in case they stop appearing. But when they do come, ask questions, that’s what I would say.

JF Yeah. Let me just, we don't have too much time, but P6 and P7, Ross, at Dunbog Primary School in Fife. Again, thank you very much for being here, hello. So, oh there's lots of questions here, let's see if you can answer them really quickly.

RM Okay, quick fire.

JF Ten, 20 seconds for each answer. Ella says, what inspires you to write about magic?

RM What inspires me to write about magic is, oh, just that wish that magic was real. I mean, for all we know it is real, it's out there and we just don't know about it. I love books, and like I said, magical things happen in our world, but we just don't know about it. So I suppose that idea has always been really appealing to me, to start off in our world, and then to dive into this underbelly, this other part.

JF Juliette, from the same school, Dunbog Primary School in Fife. If you were in the Leap of Faith room, would you be scared to jump?

RM Oh yeah, I would. I would have to hold someone’s hand, I think, to jump over there, yeah.

JF Oh, that’s good. And Kelly, from the same school, of all the powers Mr Silver could give Daniel, why did you choose, being able to speak different languages?

RM Because I am rubbish at learning other languages, and I wish I could speak other languages. I went to Barcelona last year, and I just, I'm rubbish.

JF Was your Catalan rubbish?

RM It was absolutely horrific. So, I think that was just a sort of wishful thinking on my part. I would love to be able to go anywhere, and just instantly speak that language. And yeah, that appealed to me.

JF There you go. Well, you’ve still got time, you’ve still got time to brush up on various languages. Can you believe it, through the magic of time, the timey-winey thing, we’re at the end of today’s session, almost.

RM Oh, that flew.

JF How did that happen, I just don't know.

RM It was so quick.

JF It's because you're so good, and what you've been talking about is so interesting. Yeah, but thank you very, very much, Ross, and indeed, thanks to everybody who sent in questions, it's been great to hear from you. And we will have this event, as always, but maybe it's the first time you've tuned into this, but you will be able to watch it on demand, so you can watch it later with your family or friends, spread the word. And not only this one, but all the previous Authors Live events, and there are literally millions – not quite, but there are a lot. So you can go to those and enjoy them at scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive. And our next event is going to be a real Halloween treat. James Robertson and Lari don, they'll be here on the 29th of October with some spooky stories, and Room on the Broom in Scots. You can find all the details, again, at scottishbooktrust.com. Ross, thanks again.

RM Thank you, thank you everyone for tuning in.

JF I know, it's been really, really good. So we hope to see you again very soon. In the meantime, from Ross and from me, and everyone on the team here, bye, bye.