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Other speakers: Audience (Aud), Anna (A), Boy in Audience (Boy), Girl in Audience (Girl)

S: Hello everybody and welcome to Authors Live at the BBC at Edinburgh Festivals. Give yourselves a big round of applause. My name's Sian and I am your host for today's event. Now before we go any further we have to do a very special hello. We've got people watching in schools and libraries all across Scotland, so if everyone can turn and face this camera here, can you give a big wave to everyone watching? Please wave back, please wave back people watching. Oh, we're glad you could join us. And we are also going to be on social media, so if anyone is watching in a school or library and you'd like to Tweet us any pictures, any drawings that you're doing, or any thoughts you have on today's event you can use the hashtag BBCauthorslive. We would love to hear your thoughts.

But now onto the main event. So today's author has written more books than I can even count. He has written the Astrosaurs series, he's written Cows in Action, he's written Slime Squad, he's written for the Young Bond series, and now he's writing some books called Magic Ink which are amazingly funny action adventure books. He's here today to tell us a little bit more about his writing and about the amazing world that he can create with words. Are you guys ready? In that case I need you to do the biggest round of applause you can as we welcome to the stage the completely amazing Steve Cole.

SC: Hello. Hi, how're you doing? You alright? My name is Steve Cole and I write books. Yeah, oh, yeah. Yeah, you know what I'm talking about. Like books, books, books, books. I write so many books I've got books coming out of my ears, I've got books coming out of my pants which is why I almost never ever sit down. But before I start talking about books, what I use for stories and use my imagination and all that kind of good stuff, I need to speak to you about something even more important. I need to speak to you about fruit.

Now hands up anyone who likes fruit round here. Wow, okay. I don't know what's happening at the lovely schools over there, but there's loads of people putting their hands up here. That's very nice. Clearly you're the sort of people if I say to you an apple you think, ooh, an apple. How crisp and juicy and delicious. I want an apple. Give me an apple. Yeah? Like that. I'm very happy for you, because fruit's very healthy, that's very nice. It's not that I don't like fruit, I just find it boring, you know. It's, like, boring. Aw, I think of an apple and I just think, aw, it's like skin and a stalk and pips and a little sort of fuzzy bit at the bottom – I don't even know what that is – and it's, like, I'm just not interested in the apple, which is a shame because I want to be healthy, I want to be able to leap about and do fun things. Fruit is good for that.

But I find the banana one of the more acceptable fruits. I think you'll recognise that banana. It's beautiful, isn't it? I like bananas very much and I was lying in bed the other day trying to think, how can I make fruit more interesting? How can I make bananas more exciting? And a thought zapped into my brain – I don't know if you've ever thought this – I suddenly thought to myself, what would happen if a vampire ate a banana? What would happen? Because obviously if a vampire bites you it's like crap, it's like game over, yeah? Three days later you rise from the dead a vampire yourself. Ooooh. So what would happen if a peckish vampire bit a banana? Maybe three days later in the kitchen bin that banana's lying there and suddenly, chreeee, it reforms not as an ordinary banana, but as a vampire banana.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Otherwise known as a banampire, yeah? And the genius of the banampire is that it can hide in any fruit bowl, you wouldn't even realise. You go to pick it up you're, oh, this banana feels strangely icy cold to the touch, but it's just a banana. It couldn't hurt me, could it? Or could it? You go to peel the banampire and that is when it strikes, waahh. Suddenly there's a banana at your throat. Not a fruity fang, it's going, eeh, eeh, eeh, eeh, eeh, eeh, eeh, eeh, eeeeeeh.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Are you finished? Eeh. Mmm. Aw, poor banampire. Of course he may be back from the dead, but he's still all soft and squishy on the inside, isn't he. His fangs are useless. They can't scratch, they can't even break the skin. It's useless. Chop up the banampire.

I probably won't write stories about them. They are a bit rubbish, but let's not give up on the banana as a source of story telling gold. There's so much more

you can do with just an ordinary banana. Maybe an exciting space adventure with bananas, yeah? Instead of Star Wars, Banana Wars, yeah?

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Get rid of Anakin Skywalker, bring on Banana Skin Skywalker, yeah? If you peeled a banana and a lightsaber burst out, beeshwoo, almost took your nose off, now that's interesting fruit, isn't it?

Or maybe space isn't your thing. Maybe you'd prefer a tender romantic love story with a banana. Ooh, my darling banana, mm mm mm mm mm.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: You've always been a-peeling to me. A peeling banana – aw, no, sorry, sorry. What about an exciting police drama with bananas, yeah? A couple of maverick banana detectives assigned to solve baffling fruit based crimes screeching up to the scene of the crime in an old tin of fruit cocktail. Nee naw, nee...roooooo, they go leaping out. Excuse me, love, we understand you mugged an apricot this morning.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: You're under arrest. Imagine that, marched away to the police station by bananas. How embarrassing, how shameful would that be? That would be terrifying. You don't want that to happen.

But straight away I'm thinking, hey, bananas? Yeah, I'm a bit more excited about the banana now. If I see a banana I might well eat it before it can eat me, yeah? Because the reason I do all that stuff is because being a writer is all about chucking imagination at words and things to make them more interesting, or to imagine stories about them. It's something that we all do very well. Sometimes we think, oh, no, I can't think of anything to write a story about. You know what? You will never ever have that problem if you follow this very simple tip. Basically you just get two words and squash them together like I did with the word banampire, remember? Banana, vampire, squash them together and get banampire. It's a dead easy way of making up stuff to write about.

I wrote a series of books called Astrosaurs and the two words of that are of course astronaut and dinosaur. Squash them together, astrosaur. It's a dinosaur in space. It's so easy to do. You could all do it very easily. Take something ordinary and boring like this chair, an ordinary boring chair here, yeah. What a boring old chair. But if you cross that chair with something a bit more exciting, something like a zombie, chair zombie, squash them together, a chombie, yeah?

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Now, you know, there's a bit of laughter there. You might find, you know, that chombie isn't anything particularly...aaarrggghhh [laughter]. Sit on a chombie it will bite you on the bottom, won't it, yeah? Yeah, because think about it, it's obvious. You know, a zombie wanted to eat your brain. A chombie wants to chow down on your cheeks, that's what it wants.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Imagine you're in your school, yeah? You're, sort of, all sitting in your seats and suddenly your teacher's sitting there and she goes, ooh, aahh, class, my bottom's being eaten by a chombie.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: It's too late for me, save yourselves, run class run. And of course you get up in confusion and panic, what's going on? Suddenly all your chairs start going, mmm, bottoms, mmm. Imagine suddenly you find you're running through the school pursued by a load of chombies. Mmm, come back. Imagine that? Horrifying. Isn't it a horrifying thought?

I don't know how you could beat an evil chair zombie, but that's kind of what you have to worry about when you're making up your story. It's so easy. Think about – I don't know – you could do all sorts of things and squash them together, you know. Like – I don't know – things like animals, yeah, animals. Maybe you could get a poodle and a goldfish, poodle goldfish together that's a poofish.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Okay, no, don't do that. Bad example. Let's not do that. Let's go back to the astrosaurs, yeah, because dinosaurs in space, what's not to like about that? I like the idea of not just ordinary dinosaurs, but extraordinary dinosaurs, yeah? Remember it's like throwing imagination at things as well as at words. The dinosaur was a big, kind of, like, lumbering thing. I think it's more fun to imagine them as, like, super heroes in space and super heroes have played a big part in my own reading as a child and as an adult as well. You can see a lot of super hero elements in my books. There's the Cows in Action, they're time travelling secret agent cows. There's the Astrosaurs Academy, that's where ordinary dinosaurs go to become extraordinary astrosaurs. There's the Secret Agent Mummy there who goes around having adventures. Obviously he's thousands of years old, but he's so bad at catching criminals he's still looking for them in today.

And The Slime Squad, they're little miniature monster super heroes. More about monsters later, because, ooh, I do like monsters.

I wrote a book called Magic Ink which was all about a boy like me who liked super heroes very much and wished he could be one himself. And that for me was a lot of fun, because you can really use your imagination when it comes to super heroes. Not just modern super heroes, but medieval super heroes, yeah. It turns out that Merlin the wizard was actually a big comic book fan, yeah, and he created some super heroes himself. There's Lantern Girl there, Lantern Girl with the amazing medieval power of being able to cast a small light from her finger, which sounds pretty lame and rubbish to us today, but in medieval times that was awesome. No candle required, yeah? If you were a monk trying to transcribe a book and your candle had blown out, suddenly to the rescue, Lantern Girl, ding, yeah?

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: There's a war commander there, a big knight. Unfortunately war commander, WC also stands for water closet, another name for a toilet. A bit unfortunate for the war commander there. And that's Harvest Boy there. Harvest Boy with the power to harvest a million potatoes an hour, yeah? Again what a boring super power that would be, but back in medieval times when your life or death was all down to whether your harvest was any good or not, having Harvest Boy around really helped out.

The hero of my book Magic Ink, Stew wants to be Stupendous Man which is pretty cool, because he has the power basically to whatever he touches he can absorb that power and transmit it. So if you were a bad guy right there, yeah, and I was Stupendous Man I could, like, touch glass, yeah, touch a window or something, transmit glass molecules through the air, ooooooooooh, like that and turn you into glass. One punch from me, my friend, and you would shatter into a thousand pieces. I suggest you come to the police station quietly and you would have to obey of course. But imagine that, if you touched a seagull say you'd get the power of flight and the power to nick chips off people at the seaside. Awesome, what a great power that would be. So, you know, I had quite a lot of fun with that.

And making up super heroes is quite a fun thing to do. Would anyone like to come up to the front and help me out with a bit of a super hero? Now don't put your hands up if you're shy. I don't want you getting up here and saying, I can't do what you want me to do because I'm shy. Don't be stupid. Come on here. There's only thousands of people watching in schools all around Scotland. Hi

there, guys. Are you having a good time? Excellent. So someone who's good at acting, someone who's not afraid to, kind of, like, you know, shout in a funny way. So who wants to come and help me out? The girl, do you want to come out to the front, yeah? No, you, I'm looking at you...you, you, number 44, come on, come on, come up here, come up here. And I think we've got an exciting microphone for you to speak into here. Let's see if it works. Hello, what's your first name?

A: Anna.

SC: Anna. Anna, hi Anna, how are you doing? Anna is the same forward and back, isn't it, Anna, Anna, Anna, Annnnnnnnnnn. Also it sounds a bit like nanna. Are you a banana?

Aud: [Laughter].

A: No.

SC: She treated me like I was foolish there. I feel duly chastised. Okay, so tell me, Anna, do you have a favourite animal?

A: Yes.

SC: What is your favourite animal?

A: A leopard.

SC: Ooooh, and what is it about the leopard that you particularly enjoy?

A: I don't know.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: I don't know. It's just my favourite. It's a gut instinct thing. I see a leopard, I thought, you are my favourite of all the animals, apart from the fact that you could completely kill me with just one swipe of your claws or your jaws going argh yum, like that. So apart from that, is it the power of the leopard that you like?

A: Kind of.

SC: Or because it looks like a big cat and it's quite fluffy and furry?

A: [Laughter] no.

SC: No? I'm beginning to think you don't like leopards at all, but never mind, we'll go with it. Imagine if ordinary Anna suddenly became the extraordinary, oh, who could it be? It must be the incredible Leopard Person.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: With her amazing battle cry of raaaar.

A: Raaaaaar.

SC: [Laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Oh, yeah, that's a sound that's going to put fear into any super villain's heart, isn't it. Let's try that again, Anna.

A: Raaaaaaaar [laughter].

SC: Oh, yeah, that's what I'm talking about, raaaaaaaar. Okay, so has anyone got any ideas how ordinary Anna could become the extraordinary Leopard Person?

Boy: Got bitten by a mutant leopard.

SC: Got bitten by a mutant leopard. Don't you hate it when that happens? You go to the zoo and there's, like, all the leopards just lying around and there's one mutant leopard going raaaaaaaar...

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: ...leaping through going raaaaaaaar, like that and gives her amazing leopardy powers. Okay, fantastic, amazing leopardy powers. But what else might have happened to turn her into Leopard Girl? Anyone else got any ideas for an origin story there? Yeah?

Boy: [Inaudible 00:13:08].

SC: She hadn't really liked...

Boy: [Inaudible 00:13:08].

SC: Oh, she [inaudible 00:13:10] then he went vicious like that. Oh, so you just thought they were all cuddly, cuddly, cuddly cats. Oh, they're so nice and then raaaaaaaar [laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: And then, yes, you absorb some of their powers. But what powers does she have. What powers does the amazing Leopard Person have? What can she do? Let's think of some powers here. Powers, powers, powers, powers, yes.

Girl: The power of cuteness.

SC: The power of who?

Girl: Cuteness.

SC: The power of cuteness. Oh, wow, imagine that. Yeah, okay, so I'll be the super villain. Nothing in the world can stop me from launching a terrible attack on the whole of Edinburgh. A-hah hah hah. On, no, it's Leopard Person and she's looking really cute [laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Oh, no, she's so cute the way she's going oh purr, purr. Oh, I can't possibly commit my evil plan. I'll come into the police station with you. Thank you very much. Yeah, that could work. Anything else, what other powers does she have? Yes?

Girl: Super speed.

SC: Say again?

Girl: Super speed.

SC: Super speed, of course, yes, because leopards are really fast, aren't they. So I'll be...nothing can stop me from doing something really, really bad. Oh, no, it's Leopard Person. She's running so fast [laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: And she's going to give her battle cry.

A: What?

SC: [Laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Not the battle cry of what? The battle cry of raaaaaaaar.

A: Raaaaaaaar.

SC: That's the one. That's good. Oh, no, I just wet my pants. Oh, no. Yeah, lovely.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Another power for Leopard Person. What else could she do, what else could she do? Yes.

Girl: The power of spots.

SC: The power of spots. Yes, leopards have spots. She can inflict really bad acne on any super villain in town [laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Oh, no, thank goodness I'm wearing this mask because I'm so ashamed [laughter]. My skin is now covered in spots. Oh, no, curse you Leopard Person.

A: What?

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: [Laughter]. I said, curse you Leopard Person. [Pause/laughter] growl at me.

Aud: [Laughter].

A: Raaaaaaaar.

SC: Raaaaaaaar [laughter], yeah, it's all in the growl, it's all in the roar. That's very good indeed, very good indeed. And of course the wonderful thing is that Leopard Person can take off her mask and become the ordinary Anna going back to her seat for a massive round of applause from you lot. Well done, Anna, fantastic work there, fantastic. Very good indeed, very good indeed. Now earlier on I was asking some of the schools who are watching whether they had any super powers that they would really enjoy and some of them have got back to me. Like Strathkinness Primary School in Fife would like to have the super power of earth raiser so that when we stamped on the ground it would shoot upwards.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Not the most obvious super power that comes to mind, but I'm liking that very much. Imagine that, earth raiser, I stuck my...aahh, like that. It might be quite fun to be able to do that.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: And Burravoe School in Shetland, their favourite super power would be to squish bad people.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Yes, squish them. Yeah, I squish you, I squish you, yeah? We'd all like that power, wouldn't we? I would probably use that power for bad in the end. It would be too tempting to squish people. Or to turn into a drone and see everyone. Ooh, yeah [laughter]. So if you see something weird hovering overhead, it's probably someone from Burravoe School in Shetland. That's nice. We have some other suggestions as well. From Nesting Primary in Shetland, the super power they would like, invisibility. I would like that too very much, invisibility. We'll get onto invisibility later on. And the power to fly and to teleport anywhere. Yes, I would like that too. If none of you laugh at the next joke I would teleport away and it wouldn't hurt that you're not laughing at me. That would be pretty cool.

So imagining super powers like that is just part of the fun of using our imaginations and applying them to ordinary people. Because so many super heroes are like that, aren't they. They seem ordinary people, suddenly extraordinary things happen to them again and again. Very rarely are they already extraordinary. I mean, I suppose Superman is an example of someone who was extraordinary. He's an alien, isn't he, an alien from the planet Krypton. Suddenly he comes here and something in the sun's radiation gives him super powers. He's so super he wears his pants on the outside of his trousers.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: It doesn't get much more super than that, does it. Or think about poor Bruce Banner who turns into the Incredible Hulk when he's over laden by gamma rays, yeah? Suddenly every time he gets angry, raar, or that he changes colour, doesn't he. He turns green, swells up, rips through his tee shirt and shirt. Luckily he doesn't rip through his trousers – that would be embarrassing, wouldn't it – I am the hulk, woo!

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: No one wants to see that hulk. All kinds of big green wrong going raaaaar. But imagining these, sort of, like, transformations and changes can be a lot of fun. It's certainly something I like to put into various of my stories, including my latest one which is called Invisible Inc you see there. Now these are ordinary people who are turned super heroic by fate and by a Victorian lady inventor. You see her there, Lady Jemima Smyth. The boy in front there is called Noah Deer. Why did I call him that? I've no idea [laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: See what I did there? Oh, yeah, yeah, bear with me. So, yeah, lots of possibilities for Noah Deer jokes there. And behind them you see this is Sir Guy de Yupp and his pony, Maloney. Sir Guy de Yupp. Yeah, you didn't like that one?

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Oh, no. Everyone's a critic. What are you going to do? Yeah, so Sir Guy, because the thing about Invisible Inc is it's told from the point of view of Noah Deer, but everyone else gets a chance to read some of the story as well, including Sir Guy. So I thought I'd read you a little bit from Invisible Inc. Basically all you need to know so far is that Noah has been turned invisible by a strange invention called pow powder. He finds he's not the only person to be turned invisible and intangible, unable to touch ordinary things, pretty much like a living ghost. There's also Lady Jemima there, there's Sir Guy and his pony Maloney and they've got to basically find a way of stopping this evil wizard called Seerblight before he takes over the world, and even worse than that, hurts Noah's mum. So they've really got to get in there and sort things out to which end they are making weapons.

There is only one metal they are able to touch and interact with and that is tungsten carbide. Tungsten carbide has the chemical element symbols of WC. Did you know that? It's true. It is the toilet of the elements in many ways. So that's what they're working with trying to make armour and weapons from WC, tungsten carbide, so here we go with chapter 18.

Being a most true and worthy account of high adventure and heroism by I, Sir Guy de Yupp, the most famous swordsman in the whole of France probably. No one French in the audience today, is there? No? If so, I'll apologise in advance for the terrifying accent I'm going to be attempting today. Ah, yes, the wait is over. Here I am, Sir Guy de Yupp taking my turn to record the heroic trials of our toil and trudge. While jeune Noah helped my Lady Jemima in the final phases of our war effort I oversaw all other matters. We threw ourselves into our labours with joy, especially me. [Inaudible 00:19:49] I shouted. I shouted it often, many times an hour loudly and at random to give cheer to my fellows. Hah hah, yeah, I did. It's over there. There you go.

Verily did my Lady Jemima work tirelessly charging through her work like the finest foot soldier through the front lines of the enemy's ranks. Her design seemed sound enough and so too did the execution. By execution I mean the carrying out, not the slicing off of a head, hah hah hah. I was the appointed weapons tester as I had most experience of fighting in the field. That was

fighting in the field and in the swamp, the hillsides, the beach and once even in a large tin bath, but I digress. Soon with but a day and a half before glorious battle commenced I was testing the weapons for the first time in 500 years. Weapon un, the sword of hell fire. It is sick but not sick like someone with cholera. I studied this weapon first with some surprise. It was made of the mighty metal WC and sat well in my hand. However I had thought a sword was felt to be too what you say primitive for modern combat. Not so the sword of hell fire. Yes, the sword of hell fire well named by jeune Noah has a power pack and trigger built into the hilt and it says here it fires a hot energy light ray. I believe this is fancy speak for it is a sword gun that smites thine enemies dead as stones and roasts them as guinea fowls over a flame, hah hah hah. Result.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Weapon 2, or deux, the Lancelot. It's wicked like a witch, and yet do not burn it like a witch. That would profit ye not. This lance looks and feels like an ordinary lance except the tip glows red hot and can burn through any armour. Cool, only hot. Such is science. Weapon trois, the shield [inaudible 00:21:47]. Max out your fury, this was my own design. Who needs technology. It is a shield upon which I have stuck bits of very pointy holly. Ouch, hah hah hah. And not only this but the berries are poisonous. Hah, beware. I am also stoked like the furnace that my pony Maloney is armed – or legged – with fetlock shockers. The small battery powered pads of WC allow him to transmit an electric shock to any who might attack him, and indeed any who might not attack him if Maloney so takes against him. Hah, hah, the choice is his. He has also been given a special bad saddle. I do not mean a saddle that is very poor. This is bad in the slang meaning of the word that it is actually not bad at all, but rather good. Apparently a rather good saddle does not sound cool enough, although since it is made of metal it actually is cool so long as you stay out of direct sunlight. In terms of what it does, ah, you will learn for yourselves by reading this book. The time for battle fast approaches and I must rest. Verily I am exhausted by this use of words. I am a warrior born, not a scribe [laughter]. And so I shall take my leave of you. Do not be having the cow about this, man. Noah's report shall make good reading I am sure. Not as good as mine, but then what is. Hah, hah. Hah hey, [inaudible 00:23:09]. Thank you very much [laughter].

Oh, yes, thank you for indulging my atrocious accent there. Now there are of course many monsters our heroes have to fight. There's the poultry-geists. Yeah, huge sinister chicken monsters. Brilliant illustrations here by the fabulous Jim Field of course as always. They can, like, turn half intangible half solid. They can attack, they can interact with the ghost stories there, the Invisible Inc

and they can, yeah, make a pretty nasty mess. They also have to come up against the evil and terrifying Mr Butt.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Now I don't know if you can work out how he got his name, but it's not pretty. Yeah? I do love inventing weird characters and freaky monsters like that, because again monsters like super heroes give us a real way to, kind of, use our imaginations and really engage with that stuff. So in the book *Stop Those Monsters* which is another one in this series of Magic Ink adventures which goes from *Magic Ink* to *Alien Stink*, *Stop Those Monsters* and *Invisible Inc* – although they're all stand alone, you don't have to read them in any order – I really made it my business with *Stop Those Monsters* to make them really, kind of, like, very monstrous really as you can see here. There's all sorts of evil, like, a jellyfish creature rising out from the toilet there. Pretty scary. A giant hand with many fingers, there's evil things coming up the stairs, there's monsters at the top of the stairs, they're coming out of the wall. Look, there's a little hook coming up there getting poor old Hero Boy there, so there's all sorts of monsters.

Bostradamus, she's the worst of the lot, the evil queen of the monsters. You can see she's going coo-ee, not in a friendly way. That is the thing she says, coo-ee before she actually eats you. Not very nice at all. That is The Chopper, he's a monster called a jollywobble. There's very little jolly about him, but quite a lot that wobbles which isn't very nice. Next to the jollywobble there is Killgrotty, Captain Killgrotty. He's pretty evil as well, three legs, very large shoulders and a whole lot of nasty attitude. You can see what's happened to that poor monster at the front there, he hasn't come off well against that jollywobble.

So making up monsters and deciding what they want, what they're like is part of the whole fun of using our imaginations. Again you can see here, look, there's everything from a weird pig monster with four eyes to a, sort of hairy thing with a little monster living in his mouth, a weird sort of mammoth thing there. It looks like some spring onions have turned monstrous that side. And you can even see the little monster holding his eyeballs out from behind a tree there. Now this is why I'm going to need your help to, kind of, like, help me think of some monstrous activities. I'm going to need my microphones to go wandering as well so we can get proper answers out of you. Basically we're going to have a go at making a monster, okay, and deciding what it looks like and what it wants. Again remember there's no right or wrong answer, so I hope everyone will join in. Adults as well feel free to put your hands up and you in the schools as well think about it, talk about it. Maybe you can write stories about these monsters later on,

that would be really cool. I've got some of your examples here as well. I'm going to be reading out those too.

So let's start off with an easy one. What colour is our monster? What colour is the monster? Let's have a think. This is a nice easy one, isn't it. Emma, go for it. Choose someone who's got their hand up there. [Pause].

Boy: Blue.

SC: It's a blue monster. Okay, I'm liking that. Now it's blue, but what sort of texture is it like? What's the texture like? Is it, kind of, like, is it furry, is it squelchy? Next one, that girl there. Yeah, what do you think?

Girl: Wood.

SC: It's wood [laughter]. It's a blue wood like monster. That's good, because it could probably hide and make you think it's a Tardis or something. Yeah, just like blue and wood, yeah, nothing to see here.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: And then suddenly it could strike, yeah? Ooh, a scary thought, scary thought suddenly. Okay, so it's blue, it's kind of wooden like. Let's, sort of, think about its features. How many eyes does this monster have? How many eyes? Let's go and pick someone there. How many eyes does it have?

Girl: Six.

SC: Six eyes. So when it blinks it's, like, whoo, you might get a little brush of breeze there to your fringe when it blinks at you. Six eyes. What about noses? How many noses does it have? Yes?

Boy: Two.

SC: Two noses. That's nice. So when it's blowing one it's sniffing something with the other. Isn't that a skill to have? Wouldn't that be nice? That would be fantastic. I'd love that. How many legs does our monster have? How many legs, how many legs I'll ask you? Yes?

Girl: One hundred.

SC: One hundred legs. Can you imagine the mood that monster's going to be in after he's put his trousers on in the morning? It's, like, two legs down one, oh, no, no, it's taken me ages. He probably just goes around naked.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: A blue wooden nude monster running around the place. That's a pretty scary thought. I'm not sure I like that. Okay, let's imagine a bit more about our monster, because when you, sort of, describe something clearly in a story that's when the person reading your story really starts imagining themselves in there with you in the story, yeah? They want to really see what it's like, what it smells like, what it looks like, all that stuff. First of all what does our monster smell like? What does he smell like? Let's pick someone there. What does he smell like?

Boy: Manure.

SC: Manure. Uh, the horrible smell of manure, yeah. Yeah, it may look like I'm made of wood, but actually there's something a whole lot fleshier going on.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Oh, that's nice. Okay. Now let's imagine that's a way you could write them into the stories, like, they're having a little chat and suddenly it's, like, sniff sniff, do you smell that? The monster's coming. The inescapable smell of manure and wood [laughter] is coming straight for us. Okay, let's imagine how big this monster is and one easy way of doing that is say it's as big as a...so let's have it's as big as a...

Girl: Tree.

SC: It's as big as a tree. And I'm not talking about a little sapling, it's a big oak tree, it's a big oak tree. I particularly like the oak tree reference, because I am of course a big wooden...that's very nice. Yeah, I like crapping in trees.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: So if you see this massive blue [laughter], massive tree size monster hiding in a tree you know what's going on. Alright, something else it's as big as? It's as big as a...anything else? I'm asking you if you've got any ideas...as big as...

Boy: As big as [pause] the sky.

SC: As big as the sky itself. Now that is one heck of a big monster, isn't it? Imagine it, yeah, it comes in and it blots out the sunlight. It's like a huge shadow covers over the earth. What a terrifying thought. It's as big as the sky. Let's see what some other schools have said. Strathkinness Primary School in Fife, what did they say? They've said it was as big as an asteroid hurtling towards the Earth. Ooh, I like that very much. St Ninian's in Dumfries, someone said the monster

was as big as the Eiffel Tower. The Eiffel Tower, La Tour Eiffel. No, I won't be speaking to you again, don't worry.

And what about as small as? Imagine it has the power of size control, because obviously a monster as big as the sky or as big as a tree, it's going to find it not very easy to hide out. People are going to say [laughter] I've been waiting here all day for some earthlings to come along so I can eat them, but weirdly they're staying away. Maybe it's because I'm really, really massive and stink of manure. I don't know, maybe that's something to do with it, so let's say you can go really, really small. As small as what? As small as?

Girl: A mouse.

SC: As small as a mouse. Fantastic. Just a little squeaky mouse, ee ee ee ee ee. Oh, what a cute little blue...waaahhh. Of course it can grow bigger when you least expect it. That's part of its terror. As small as?

Boy: An eyeball.

SC: As small as an eyeball. Oh, yeah, that's a nice one. As small as an eyeball, woo. As small as a mouse's eyeball, as small as a worm's eyeball. Do worms have eyeballs? Probably not. We'll gloss over that. So what have we got? St Ninian's again, they say it's as small as a particle. That's nice. Or from Strathkinness in Fife, the monster was as small as a beady thousand eyed maggot.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: I'm liking that. That's a good one, yeah. I might steal that one. I hope you don't mind. I might nick that one for myself. The next time I write a story about beady thousand eyed maggots, that might well go in. Okay. So we've got this big/small monster, it's blue, it's wooden, it's got six eyes, it's got a hundred legs, it stinks of manure, it's all nasty. But what does it want? What has it come to us for? What has it made itself known for now? It must want something. It's always good if your monster wants something, because then you can work out a way to defeat it, yeah? You want to understand what it's after, maybe even do something about it. So let's have a think. What is the monster after? What has it come to our world for? Let's ask this girl. Yes?

Girl: Chocolate.

SC: For chocolate.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: I have come because I want your chocolate. Oh, the chocolate. What, all of it? Yes, all the chocolate. What, even the really, sort of, like, nasty cheap stuff you get in advent calendars? Especially that.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Yeah, could be, could be. Yeah, I like the idea of that. Maybe the hero then would be like the biggest chocoholic in the world. He says, I cannot give away my chocolate, but I must save the world. What a great dilemma that would be. I'm feeling it, I'm feeling it right here. I love that. Okay, another idea? What else might it be after if not chocolate? Something else? What else might it be after? Yes?

Boy: It might be after the world, like, stinking the world.

SC: It wants the world. I want the whole world. I won't beat about the bush [laughter], I have come here for the world. I want the whole world. I know I'm as big as a tree, but I want the whole place, yeah. It's all going to be mine and for that I need to destroy all human beings. I don't want you polluting my lovely planet, yeah. So he wants the whole world. Imagine that. Well, he's going to have to be stopped in that case, isn't he, because otherwise, you know, where are we all going to go? I don't know. Something else, another thing that it wants? What else is it after? Let's find out there, what else is it after?

Girl: A chair.

SC: A chair. I've come to your planet because I want a chair. Here you are then. Oh, thanks very much [laughter].

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: I'm glad I didn't have to get nasty and have to eat anybody. I'll be off, bye. Yeah, that would be an unexpected ending, wouldn't it. Okay, so how are we going to defeat this monster? Well, it's come here for chairs, chocolates and generally the world, but what is its secret weak point? All monsters have a weak point. Lots of examples here. Let's go to Burravoe School in Shetland, they reckon there we could defeat the monster with mouldy tomatoes, yeah? I've got a weakness actually, I can't stand tomatoes. I would be like the monster in that case. Something else, let's think of another weak point that these monsters might have. Yes? No, forgotten? [Pause]. Something about his tummy.

Boy: A giant.

SC: A giant? His weak point is a giant. Brilliant. If we could only find a giant we can defeat the monster. Okay, where's the giant? What do you mean we don't have any giants. Nooooo. Maybe we'd have to get people to dress up as a giant and confront him and they must be going, oh, no, that's far too scary. I'm off, bye. Yeah.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Okay. Another thing, another secret weak point for this monster. Yes, the girl there, yeah.

Girl: Sunlight.

SC: Sunlight. Yeah, if he came at night time that would be, aha, nothing in the whole world can stop me. What time is it? Seven am. Oh, no, aarrgghh, no, switch off the big light...

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: ...in the sky that burns, the big light in the sky that burns, ayeeeeee. Tragically horrifying, but luckily our heroes didn't have to do anything at all in that case. Well, that's sorted itself out [laughter]. Let's get on with the day. Something else. What else might we be able to defeat our monster with? Yes.

Girl: Cold macaroni and cheese.

SC: Cold macaroni and cheese. Yes, it's the worst kind. Revenge is a dish best served cold and so is macaroni and cheese. Noooooo.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: The monster can't bear the thought of that slimy stuff. Oh, he goes straight off out into space or deep down underground where he's come from without telling anyone at all. That is fantastic. Well, give yourselves a round of applause for some fantastic ideas of how you can defeat that monster. Brilliant. But you see how easy it is when you start getting ideas going. Using your imagination becomes so easy. The crazier it is the better in a way.

Now I imagine that monster could have come from outer space, because I'm very big on space. You can see from my tee shirt there I wrote a book called Alien Stink. That is an alien called Little G. He's quite a loveable alien. He goes around saying, hello, Little G, give me a hug and no one really wants to hug him, because he looks a bit weird. But, you know, he's actually fairly nice, or he looks nice, but what's he doing with that fish? Look at that. He's going to eat the fish.

Oh, but then look, the fish looks quite happy about it, so maybe actually something else is going on. Maybe he's actually helping that fish to survive in the saliva on his alien tongue, yeah? Well, it's either that or the fish dies. Do you want the fish to die? I don't think so [laughter]. Yes, we hate the fish. Kill the fish. That's charming, because that's actually the world's only intelligent goldfish, but, you know, you have to read Alien Stink to find out more about that.

So sometimes you look at an alien and you think, oh, well, that's quite cute and quite cuddly. Other times you look and you think, ah, well now things aren't always as they seem, are they. But anyone think this is a friendly monster?

Aud: Yeah.

SC: Yeah?

Aud: Yeah.

SC: Totally wrong. He's an evil tittersnipe. He will kill you, scrunch you, eat you and generally do really, really horrible things. Tittersnipes to be avoided at all costs. Because although, yeah, you could say, yeah, actually the monster was really nice and he was just misunderstood sometimes it's nice to have a monster, an alien who comes along and is just absolutely vile and horrible and scary, and will send you running in the opposite direction as soon as you see him. Aarrgghh. And of course when it's your imaginations and it's your minds at work that's all the fun you can have, you see, just by making that stuff up. And you don't just have to write a story. Maybe you're thinking, well, I don't want to write books. I don't want to write books. I don't know why I'm moving that chair. I don't want to write books, you know. Why should I be interested in using my imagination?

But think about it. We use imaginations in pretty much everything we do. Whatever job we have you have to use your imagination to find out how you're going to do it best, how you're going to deal with others. We throw imagination at problems all the time. And we don't just write stories, but we also write songs, plays, poems and stuff like that and I think it's quite nice when books have their own theme tunes. So when I was 11 years old I wrote a book called Alien Stink, a very short book on paper, but when I was coming to think as an adult thinking what can I write after Magic Ink I thought, oh, yeah, Alien Stink, I remember that. And I had a little song that I wrote about it and I thought, well, how did that song go? And then I remembered it. I, kind of, worked it out. So here for you now written when I was aged 11, performed aged 44, the Alien Stink song. I thank you all. Here we go.

[Sings song]:

I've been to outer space, now there's an alien on my face, there's an alien on my toes, there's an alien up my nose, there's an alien on my tum, there's an alien on my [pause]...

Aud: Bum.

SC: Bum? What are you like? We're on the BBC.

Aud: Bum.

SC: Thumb? What's wrong with your thumb? Honestly, you're so rude. It was bum. He's insisting. Alright, bum. There's an alien in my hair, there's aliens everywhere...and the chorus goes like this:

Oooooohhhhhh – building up to it – oooooohhhhhh, I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink, oh oh oh, I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink.

Verse 2:

There's an alien on my chin, there's an alien licking my skin – ugh – there's an alien on my hips, there's an alien kissing my lips.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: There's an alien over my heart, and I think he's doing a fffff...forward roll.

Aud: [Laughter].

SC: Who's shouting fart at me? I can't do it to order. There's an alien in my shoe and I think it's been to the loo – aaww – and the catchy chorus again, uh-oh uh-oh uh-oh oh, I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. Oooohhh, I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink.

And I'm sensing you want to join in, yeah? With, kind of, like, clapping of the hands maybe, or a slow hand clap? Clap, clap, clap, clap, clap, clap. Oh oh oh, I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink – do it faster – I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens – now a bit faster – I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens...faster still. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens...faster. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. I hate aliens, smelly little aliens, I think aliens stink. Thank you very much everybody. Thank you.