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Author/Interview subject: Charlie Higson (CH)
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)
Other speakers: Audience (Aud), Tom (T), Boy (B)

Example transcript

JF Hello there. Welcome to this webcast. I'm Janice Forsyth and this webcast is the latest in a series of author's live events, brought to you from the Scottish Book trust in association with the BBC. And indeed I'm here at the BBC headquarters in Glasgow at Pacific Key and delighted that you're there because I know there are lots and lots of you watching in schools all over the UK. So hello. Yeah I can see you waving back. Now, I know you know this but forgive me- you know much more about computers and webcasts than I do- but during this, because it's a webcast, sometimes the picture might just stop, freeze or judder a little bit. The main thing is, don't worry about that, don't panic because it will adjust itself and get back to normal. But I know you know all of that anyway. Now as well as all of you out there, I think at the last count something like over 12,000 pupils in schools across the UK, I do have company here today as well as our wonderful author, we have an audience here in the Glasgow studio. They are S1 and S2 pupils from Hamilton Grammar School and Airdrie Academy, now they're a lovely, lovely bunch. So would you like to see them? Okay, here they are. They're lovely.

Aud: [Audience make groaning noise]

JF: I told you they were nice. They've sat there relaxed, the rules the rules for uniform since I was in school. Now they're a great bunch and they are infact the kind of lovely, average readers who just consume the books of our special guest today: Charlie Higson. So yes, you've met the audience. Time to meet the man himself. And as well as writing books, he's an actor, he's a comedian. You've probably seen him on the tele and loads of shows, notably the Fast Show, or right now you'll see him in Harry and Paul. Somehow he finds the time to write extraordinaryliry successful books: The Young Bond series. And this new series of zombie books, which kicked off with The Enemy, and the brand new one which's

even scarier. It's The Dead. So, our zombies here in audience and the zombies out there, please, a huge welcome for Charlie Higson.

Aud: [Audience cheer]

CH: Thank you. Thank you very much. I think this is a first for me. I don't think I've ever given a talk to the un-dead before. And it's a bit scary actually because I been normally if a talk goes wrong, the worst that could happen is maybe if you people in the audience might "boo" me. But I guess if the talk goes badly today, I risk being eaten alive. So let's hope it goes well.

Yeah, now imagine you kids sitting here, and all you kids out there watching, imagine if you woke up tomorrow morning and all the adults in the world had simply disappeared. Yes, from over there and cheer too loudly! So yeah, there's no adults left in the world. It's a world of kids. There's nobody telling you when to get up in the morning, what to wear, what to eat for breakfast, sending you off to school. There'd be no point in going to school, would there, because there would be no teachers. You could do whatever you liked: go wherever you wanted. You could stay up all night partying, I mean, eating sweets and drinking coca cola. Nobody telling you when to go to bed. Play your music as loud as you like. Sit on your computer for ten days solid without moving. Because there's no adults in the world to tell you what to do. If you got bored at home, you could take the bus into town. And I don't mean like go to bus stop, I mean actually take the bus: got o the bus station and drive the bus into town because there's nobody to stop you doing that. And maybe you want to go shopping. Obviously there's no adults to open the shops. Doesn't matter. You can just drive your bus straight through the front of the shop: smash in there and take what you want. You could take all the food off the shelves: all the chocolates and sweets and biscuits and stuff your faces with ice-cream. Stock up on all the latest DVDs and computer games, get a new xbox a new giant flat-screen TV. And you could just...you'd have a fantastic life. You could just go and live wherever you wanted. You could go and stay in the, the smartest, swankiest hotel in town, in a top floor, penthouse suite. You could sit in the Jacuzzi, eating ice-cream, watching DVDs, and having a great time.

Now that is...that is a fantasy that I used to have, when I was your age. A world without adults. A world of kids where you can go where you like, do whatever you like, with no one to stop you. And I though, you know, that would be brilliant. And I've always wanted to write a book about that. But when I actually thought about it, what would be the reality of a world without adults. It probably be really cool and fun and exciting for about a day. After that, reality would sink in. Maybe you

would get up in the morning and you'd go back to get some more ice-cream: it's all melted. It's just a sticky puddle on the floor because there's no electricity to run the freezer because there's no adults to work in the power plants, the Power Stations, to generate the electricity. So without electricity you'd have no heating, no light. You wouldn't be able to watch any of your DVDs. You wouldn't be able to listen to any of your music because it's all digital now and MP3. You could sit at your computer but there's a blank screen. No more facebook. No more mobile phones. No more movies. None of that. You'd be living in a cold, dark world. There'd be no more bubbles in you Jacuzzi. Unless of course, you want to make the bubbles yourself. And I think we all know how you do that. Yes, and also where would you get your food from? There's going to be no one to stock the shelves in the supermarkets, no one to deliver the food in the lorries. No one to even grow the food!

You'd be having to survive for yourselves. And you'd pretty soon find out that us boring adults did do some useful stuff after all: looking after you, clothing, feeding you and supplying all the things that you love doing. But without that, the world would be plunged back....you'd be back to something like the middle ages in a world before technology, before all this stuff. No electricity, you'd be having to try and find your own food: scavenge 'round, maybe in the shops and the house, find anything that was left there. You know you'd be having to use old fashioned tools and objects. It'd be a very, very, very different world. And that was, for me, was a starting point of writing a book.

I thought "yeah, that could be a really exciting, interesting book. Kids trying to survive in this new world." And then I thought "let's make it even more scary. Let's throw some zombie in there". But I thought "Well you know because, I've always been obsessed with zombies".

When I was a teenager, two of my favourite films were "Night of the living dead" and "Dawn of the dead". And these two films were the kind of, they were the start of the modern craze for cannibal, flesh-eating zombies. And zombies for me have always been the most frightening of the movie monsters because they're us: they're people. And they just keep coming at you. You can't stop them. There's a big debate in the world of zombies, about whether zombies should be the old fashioned slow type of zombie or whether they should be the modern fast zombie as we've had in films like "28 days later". Some people say, "Oh that might be scarier if they can really run at you". But to me, a zombie that is running around, is just a nutter. I prefer the slow, old fashioned, relentless type of zombie. You might get trapped somewhere, but the zombies will keep coming at you. They won't stop. They'll keep coming, and coming and coming, clawing at the

windows, scraping at the doors. You might be able to smash one out of the way, but then there'll be another one coming along behind. You keep smashing them back but they'll come and eventually they'll get in and they'll tear your guts out and eat them.

Now that for me has always been really frightening but the even more frightening thing about zombies is they could be people that you know. They could be your mother, your father, your sister, your sister, your brother, your best friend, your girlfriend, your children even. Coming at you, they used to be someone that you loved and that loved you, and maybe looked after you, cared for you, but now all they want to do is kill you and eat you. Now for me that's absolutely terrifying. And I've always been obsessed with zombies and since those films in the 1960's and 70's, zombies have exploded.

Zombies are everywhere. Kids today, I mean look at you lot. You love zombies. I expect the mostly popular Halloween get-up this year, will be zombies. Zombies and vampires probably. But for be zombies are the best- better than vampires. Vampires are wimps. But as you get zombie films, zombie TV, zombie books, zombie comics, zombie computer games: I bet loads of you have played computer games like "Dead Rising", "Left for Dead 2"....stick your hands up here if any of you have played these zombie games, or even Call of Duty, zombie mode. Yes, look! Most of you. Now you do know that you're not supposed to play those games. Their certificates...you shouldn't be playing it. In fact, this whole thing is a big trick. We simply got you here so you can confess to playing games you shouldn't be playing and you're all going to be arrested. No. Kids love zombies: they love these games, because zombies are great because you can splatter them all over the walls: that's the other reason why we all love zombies. I've got three boys: they are also, similarly obsessed with zombies.

So I thought, if I was going to write a scary book: zombies would be the thing for me. But why write a scary book in the first place? Now I started writing for kids: I wrote five of the James Bond books, which for me was an absolute dream job. I couldn't think of a better job. I grew up in the 1960's, where James Bond was the biggest thing in the world. And James Bond is still today, is still incredibly cool. And to be allowed to actually write a real James Bond book about James Bond, for me as a Bond fan, was about the best job you could have. To sit down and type the words : "The name's Bond. James Bond", is just about the most thrilling thing you can do as a writer. But I wrote five of them and I wanted to go and do something new that was very different. Those books were thrillers, so I thought, let's try doing some scary books. I figured if I could scare some kids through writing a book, they would remember that book for the rest of their lives. And, us

writers are the same as vampires and zombies: we want to live on after we've died, through our books.

So I thought, yeah, you know, let's do some scary books and I wanted to set them in the modern world because the James Bond books were set in the early 1930's. And I also thought, you see I used to do lots of events like this with kids for the James Bond books and we do questions, and one of the things that kids in the audience said, they would say "I really like the James Bond books. They're really exciting. Sometimes quite scary. But they're never too scary because I always know that James Bond is going to be alright, at the end of it: he's going to live. Of course he is because he's got to grow up to be Daniel Craig. Or Roger Moore or Sean Connery. Whoever he grows up to be".

So, you know you can be scared in a series of books like that but you always know the central character is going to be alright. So I thought, "Okay I'll have a gang of kids in the new book. And make it very clear from the start of the book that any one of these kids could be killed". Now for me that makes the books that much more scary, because you might be reading it and thinking "Well this character's safe, they're the main character in the book". But bang, they're dead! That starts to make you really worry about every other character in the book.

So all these ideas were coming together: I wanted a gang of kids, I wanted it in the modern world, I wanted zombies, I wanted there to be no other adults around. So I came up with this idea that there's been this disease that has hit the whole world. It's come from nowhere and it's acted very quickly. And of course, the people that we rely on to tell us about the disease- where it's come from, how to cure it, the scientists, doctors, whatever- they've got the disease as well. They're affected because the thing about this disease is that it only hits people over the age of fourteen: if you're younger than fifteen you're safe. Everyone over the age of fourteen has got this disease. And it's happened so quickly, that it's killed all the grownups, except for the unlucky few who are wandering around as zombies.

So you've got this situation, set in London. A group of kids are trying to survive, after everything's gone wrong: their parents are dead, older brothers and sisters are dead. They're trying to survive. They've got spears and swords and clubs. They're scavenging around in the local shops and houses trying to find cans of food that might be left, and packets of food that are still there. And the whole time, they've got to be really careful, that they're not captured by any of the gangs of wandering grownups: the mothers and fathers as they call them, who are wandering the streets, looking for the only source of fresh food that is left to them: which is you lot- kids! Kids in the book do get captured and they do get eaten.

Yes, I'm not pulling any punches. Those zombies are coming.

So I thought, "Alright, scary books. Where do I start?" I thought "How scary can I make these books?" I hadn't written horror books for kids. I thought "Okay I want kids to remember these books, but I don't want to completely traumatise them and send them into jabbering wrecks, spend the rest of their lives in mental institutions. SO I thought "How scary can I make these books?" And all I had to go on was my own kids. I thought "Okay, I'll read it to my youngest boy as a bedtime story and see how frightened he gets". I figured, if he can handle it, he was quite young at the time, then you kids out there would be safe.

So as I...you know, I would write the book and read it to my youngest boy as his bedtime stories, as I finished each chapter. And when it came to the first scary bit which is actually very near to the beginning of the book, I was thinking "Oh God, I hope he's going to be alright. I hope he's not going to be too freaked out. I hope he's going to be able to sleep." So I read this bit and I was, I was trembling myself as I was reading it. I got to the end of it and I turned 'round, expecting to see him as a kind of jabbering, quivering jelly, under the bedclothes, but he was sitting up, quite happy, smiling and said "Yeah, that was good dad". I said "What, you were not scared". And he went, "No, no it was great. I really loved the bit where the zombie's eyeballs exploded". So I was thinking "Okay, I'm going to have to make the next bit even more...scary". So I went back to my office and I really pumped up the next bit. So a few nights later we come to the next scary bit: same thing happened- he was refusing to get scared. I don't know, maybe it was because it was me reading it to him and he found that quite reassuring and maybe if he'd been reading it by himself in the dark it'd have been different. But he wasn't getting scared, so I figured "Okay, I'm going to have to work a bit harder here".

So I kept pushing nit and pushing and pushing it, making it nastier and nastier and scarier and gorier and just more horrible and gross, night after night until eventually one night, I was fast asleep. It was about four o'clock in the morning, So I heard this banging at the door and I woke up: "What's that"?

And my son burst into the room, absolute floods of tears. He'd had this terrible, this awful, nightmare, based on the book. And I thought "Yes! I've finally got him!" SO that was it, so I figured, okay, you kids can handle it.

You kids, what is it about you kids, you just love horror don't you? You love to be scared. And it's not just boys. Everybody says "Oh a zombie book. Boys will love that!" but girls love horror too. Look at the girls here, dressed as zombies. I mean, actually, the way it's become lately in horror, it seems to become vampires for

girls and zombies for boys. Is that right? Let's try here. Stick your hands up if you prefer vampires to zombies. Not very many of you, but they are all girls. What about if you prefer zombies to vampires: yes, boys and girls. Zombies are winning. I like to hear that. Because it's a weird thing. Girls now seem to think that vampires are cool and sexy and sophisticated. Girls want to go out with vampires. They want to date vampires. You're not supposed to date vampire. You're supposed to stick a stake through it's heart, maybe cut it's head off and set fire to it for good luck. You're not supposed to go to the disco with it. But girls seem to think that vampires are so cool and sexy and mood and they hang around after dark and they're terrible sophisticated because they're hundreds of years old. I think the vampire for the girls is like the ideal teenage boy that they'd like to go out with.

Zombies on the other hand. Who wants to go out with a zombie? They're dirty, scruffy, they've got terrible skin, they've got an awful diet, they communicate through grunts, their trousers are hanging off their behinds, they shuffle about the place: they're basically what teenage boys are really like, aren't they? SO vampires are the type of boys they'd like to go out with and zombies are the boys they end up going out with. Which is maybe why we've had this split between zombies and vampires.

Now rather than me just drone on and on and on and on, what I might do is, shall I read a bit out the new book for you?

Aud: Yeah!

CH: And then we'll go to some questions, shall we? Okay, I'll read a bit. This is the second book in the series, this one's called "The Dead" and it's quite a good bit to read out because this starts in a school, where some boys are being trapped in the school and the disease has just started affecting everyone around them. Please, don't try any of this at your own school, with your own teachers.

Mr Hewitt, was crawling through the broken window, sliding over the ledge on his belly, hands groping at the air, fingers clenching and unclenching, arms waving as if he was trying to swim a breaststroke.

In the half light, Jack could just make out the look on his pale, yellowing face: a stupid look. No longer human: eyes wide and staring, tears of blood dribbling from under his eyelids, tongue lolling out from between cracked and swollen lips, skin covered with boils and sores. Jack stood there frozen, the cricket bat held tight in sweating hands. He knew he should step forward and whack Mr Hewitt as hard as he could in the head, but his right arm ached all the way down. He'd been swinging the bat all night and the last

teacher he'd hit had jarred his shoulder. Now it hurt just to hold the bat, which felt like a lead weight in his hands. He knew that wasn't the real reason though.

When it came down to it, he couldn't bring himself to hit Mr Hewitt. He'd always liked him. He'd been Jack's English teacher for the last year. He was one of youngest and most popular teachers in the school, always talking to the boys about films and TV and console games, but not in a creepy way, not to get in with the kids, simply because he was genuinely interested in the same things that they were.

When the disease hit, when everything started to go wrong, Mr Hewitt had done everything he could to help the boys, trying to contact parents and make arrangements, keeping their spirits up, comforting them, reassuring them, always searching for food and water, making the building safe. And when it had got really bad, when those adults that had got sick but hadn't died had started to turn on the kids, attacking them like wild animals, Mr Hewitt had helped fight them off. He'd been tireless and it'd looked like he might escape the sickness. He'd been a hero. And now, here he was, crawling slowly, slowly, slowly, into the lower common room, like some huge, clumsy lizard.

He raised his neck, stretching it, and wheezed at Jack, bloody saliva bubbling between his teeth. Jack could see two more teachers behind him, attempting in their own mindless way to get to the window.

Jack swallowed. It hurt his throat. He hadn't had anything to drink all day. They were running low on water and trying to ration it. His head throbbed. This was the second night the teachers had attacked in force: Jack's second night without sleep. The stress and the tiredness were turning him slightly crazy. His heart felt all fluttery and he was constantly on the edge of losing it: breaking down into uncontrollable sobbing or laughter- or both.

He was seeing things everywhere, out of the corner of his eye: shapes moving in the shadows. He would shout a warning and turn to look, and there'd be nothing there. Mr Hewitt was real though: something out of a waking nightmare, slithering inch by inch.

The last hour had been chaotic, panicked scramble of running around in the dark from room to room, checking doors, windows, battering back any teachers that got past the defences. And then they'd heard breaking glass in the lower common room and he and Ed had come charging in to see what was happening. And there was Mr Hewitt.

Jack couldn't do this alone. He looked for Ed and saw him crouched down behind an overturned table. His grey face poking over the top, eyes white rimmed and staring.

Ed, his best mate. Ed, who everyone thought was cool. Last year the school had produced a glossy booklet advertising itself to new parents. And there on the front cover was Ed: the boy most likely to succeed. The happy, smiling, confident face of Rohurst...well, this was the new face of the school, hiding behind a table, scared half way to death, while the teachers crawled in through a broken window.

Ed was totally bricking it, and his fear was making him next to useless.

“Help me”, Jack croaked.

“I...I’m keeping watch”, said Ed, a slight catch, in his voice.

“Yeah right....keeping watch. Keeping safe more like”. Jack sighed. His own tiredness and fear were turning him bitter. “If you won’t help”, he said. “At least go and get on of the other”.

Ed shook his head. “I...I’m staying with you”.

“Then do something”, Jack shouted. “Hewitt’s nearly through. I need help here!”

“Well what...what, what do you want me to do”?

Jack rubbed his shoulder. He’d had enough of the school. He’d had enough of this mess. Night after night, the same bloody ritual. Right now, he’d rather be anywhere else but here. Most of all he wanted to be at home though: back in his own house, in his own room, with his own things- under his duvet with the world shut out: home.

He tossed the bat to Ed. It bounced off the table and ended up on the carpet.

“Hit him Ed”, he said.

“I’m not sure I can”, Ed replied.

“Pick up the bat and hit him”. Jack felt tears come into his eyes and he squeezed them in tight, then pinched the wetness away. “Please Ed, just hit him”.

“And then what”, Ed asked. “They just keep coming Jack. We can’t kill them all”.

“Hit him Ed. For God’s sake just hit him!”

*(Above: an extract from *The Dead*)*

CH: Now if you want to know whether he does hit him, whether they stop Mr Hewitt coming through the window. Whether Mr Hewitt eat them both. Whether Jack ever gets home, I’m afraid you’re going to have to read the book for yourselves. Thank you.

JF: A big round of applause for Charlie Higson please.

Aud: [Audience clap]

JF: That was dead good. Thank you very much indeed. You do want to read on now don't you? Now, do you fancy some questions?

CH: Yes, let's do some questions.

JF: We've had lots and lots of questions from all of you out there. Clearly we can't get through them all, Charlie, in the time we've got. So apologies if we don't do your question, but fingers crossed. What we'll do though, is we'll start off with a question from here, and we've got a young zombie in the front row. What's your name?

T: Tom.

JF: Tom. And which school are you from?

T: Hamilton Grammar.

JF: Great. Tom the zombie, from Hamilton Grammar, so what's your question for Charlie?

T: Do you think that the young Bond could defeat a zombie horde?

CH: Well that would be a good...it would be a good mash-up. There's lots of stories now where you're putting zombies together with things. There's a very famous book called *Pride and Prejudice and zombies*, which a few of my neighbours have seen in shops. And, you know, there's Marvel comics where all the Marvel superheroes turn into zombies, so the idea of young James Bond fighting off a horde of zombie I think would be pretty exciting. I'm not sure whether the people who own James Bond, who I work for, would really go for that idea. It's not the sort of thing you expect to see in a James Bond movie, but yeah I think that'd be a lot of fun and I think yeah, I think James Bond would definitely win. He would know how to deal with a horde of zombies.

JF: I wonder what Tom thinks? Who do you think would come out on top?

T: James Bond.

JF: Yeah.

CH: Yeah, James Bond always comes out on top. That's why he's the coolest guy in the world, ever.

- JF: Thank you very much Tom. We've got another question here, actually which is to do again with the Bond books and the zombies. And this is from Vego and Mondo, who are, who are home schooled in Glasgow. *What drove you to make that leap from Young Bond to zombies?* I mean, clearly you said that you've been a lifelong fan of zombies.
- CH: Yeah. Well I wanted to do something completely different to the James Bond books. And I'd done thrillers and I thought lets do horror things. I've always loved horror and I've always loved being screeed. I don't know why it is but we love to be scared. And I was really into horror films- going to see them when I was an older teenager and I wanted to give that same sort of thrill and kick to younger kid who're maybe not old enough to go and see these films in the cinema: to get that same kind of excitement and fear and kind of gross-out thing from the movies, but do that through a books and I think books can be scary...books can be scarier than films because your alone with the book and your completely immersed and you kind of associate with characters and so you know I just want to kind of pass on my love of, my love of horror and do something very different to Bond. So set it in the modern world, with a bunch of kids, rather than just one and zombies. Which, as I say, we didn't have in James Bond. Although maybe I missed a trick there.
- JF: I'm imagining you as a fan, you as a kid, you said you were a big fan of zombies and being scared. So when you are writing the books Charlie, do you get into this world where you end up scaring yourself a bit?
- CH: Yeah. I think, you know, if you're going to right something that's scary, you've got to start with thinking "what would scare me the most? What's the most frightening thing that I can think of?" Because I think, if you can't scare yourself as a writer, you're not going to scare anyone else, so I do try and feed in all the things. Particularly thinking, "if i was a kid, what's the scariest thing?" I put in lots of things here that I, in the first book, there's little kiddies about eight or nine years old and he's being through the tube tunnels underneath London, by a horde of zombies. Things like that I think will be absolutely terrifying. And when I'm writing it, yes UI do get scared. It's a bit like when I was reading it to my youngest boy; I think to start with I was more scared than he was. It's a bit like....there's a game which you kids probably all played with your parents when you were younger, where you say "Oh dad...pretend to be a monster and chase us around", and he would go around the house "Arrghh" like a zombie or whatever. These days it's dad pretending to be zombie and chasing them around and the little kids, you go running and screaming, And doing that, as an adult, you kind of scare yourself a

bit. You think “I’m too far here”. So you’ve got to do that in the book. You’re basically playing that same game when you write the books.

JF: This is from Inverkeithing High School. Hi there Inverkeithing High School reading cafe. And Charlie, they would like to know: Do you actually believe that zombies exist and roam the Earth and have you ever known any that you’ve based your books on?

CH: Well went to school like you kids and yes, most of the teachers were zombies. No, I think you’ll find that a lot of people that write horror and write about the supernatural –zombies and ghosts and vampires and things- I think most of them don’t really believe in it. And I don’t think that there are the living dead, wandering around out there. But in many ways when you’re writing about these things, you’re not just writing about zombies and the living dead, you’re writing, in many ways, I was writing about the relationship between kids and adults. And it’s quite a grownup concept, but you see, us adults, we’re all in charge. We’ve got this great world and we’re hanging onto it. But we know that we’re going to get old and useless and you kids are going to grow up and take our places and kick us out of the way. So us adults, our job is to try and eat you children before you get rid of us and your job as children is to grow up and whack us zombies out of the way. So in a way, that’s one of the things I was writing about in the book.

JF: It’s terrifying isn’t it? I don’t have to say. This next question’s from Came School. Hello Came School, everyone watching today. And this is from Connor Duffy, Charlie, who says “Were your family supportive when you started writing stories”? Did they encourage you?

CH: Well, my father was a very straight laced, old fashioned businessman : he worked as an accountant. He used to go to work, he used to commute work with his suit and his bowler hat on, in the days when business men went to work in a bowler hat. And he was very straight laced. There’d been no history of anyone in our family being writers or actors or anything like that and when I was a teenage – I was writing from when I was younger than you lot, from when I was about nine, ten years old I started writing stories to entertain myself and I loved it. I loved making up something that wasn’t there before. It’s a fantastic thing and all you need is a pen and piece of paper and suddenly there’s a person existing, doing things that weren’t there before. And for me I used to find that really exciting and I really loved writing, but my dad, he gave me a piece of advice: he said to me” Son, you’ll never be able to make any money as a writer, but to make sure you get yourself a proper job, you can always write in your spare time it’s easy and cheap to do, but get a proper job because you’ll never make a living as a writer”. And that was the best piece of advice I could have had as a teenager,

because I was teenager I completely ignored him as we all ignore any advice that our parents give us, and I've never had a proper job and I have managed to actually make a living as a writer, and have really enjoyed being a writer so thanks dad, for giving me that invaluable piece of advice.

- JF: But would you encourage people to write because I've got a question here which is from Rolston Primary School in Paisley, which says: "What advice would you give primary seven...". I supposed it's for any children. "...who want to become effective story writers?" So quite a lot of kids, I'm sure you'd agree, zombie's in the audience and out there, that lots of kids, really enjoy writing stories and then somehow, and maybe it's pressure of other subjects they have to study, that habit of writing those stories that you talked about when you were little.
- CH: So what....what advice would I give to a kid who wants to grow up to be a writer? Don't do it! I don't want the competition. I only want my books in the bookshelves. No I mean, I'm joking of course. Writing is huge fun and it is very satisfying when you get it right. But writing is like anything else – it's like riding a bike, playing football, swimming- the more you do it, the better you get at it. You have to practise it and you know, when I started the stuff I wrote was rubbish: for years. The first book I had published I think was about the sixth full length novel that I'd finished and it was the only one that I thought actually was good enough to show someone. Bt because I love writing and because I loved writing for myself and entertaining myself and making this stuff up, I stuck at it. And as I said, the more you it the better you get at it and you learn...you learn not to be too critical. I think that's really what stops a lot of kids, is they think "Oh this is terrible. This is too embarrassing. I don't want anyone to read this. I can't get the first chapter right". What you've got to do is just keep writing and writing and writing and you can always go back and change the first chapter, as many times as you like but just get on and write, and do it for yourselves. Write for yourselves, entertain yourselves. Don't worry about what anyone else thinks and you know, it is a great way to kind of take yourself out of this world and into another place.
- JF: I'm just wondering if any of you guys because clearly you're all avid readers but are any of you writers. Do any of you write stories? Yep, a few hands going up.
- CH: Any of you write zombie stories? Ah, you should do, it's great fun. You can splatter them all over the walls.
- JF: And do you...there's a boy in the front row there, just wondering, do you....have you been writing stories for a long time?

- B: Well I do it, like, on the computer at night and I've been doing it since I was like eight so I enjoy writing stories.
- CH: That's great, I mean, computers are great. I always work on a computer. And it's fantastic because it looks so much more grown up than when your writing it all in biro. 2Oh look I've wrote a proper story, in a proper book..." And I think that's a great help when that kind of, you know, it looks good. And you can go back and change it as many times as you like as well.
- JF: I was wondering: Do you show your stories to anyone else?
- B: Yeah. I print them off and read them, to my mum and dad. And I keep them in, like, a drawer in my room, like, all the stories are written just in case I need them for inspiration or something, like when I'm older.
- CH: Well, let me give you a piece of advice. You'll never make any money as a writer; go get yourself a proper job. You can always write in your spare time. And feel free to ignore that advice.
- JF: Remember that...thank you very much. We've got another question Charlie; this is from a Primary school in Glasgow: Mount Vernon Primary. Hello again, if you're watching: hope you are. And they say that they've watched a clip, which I watched last on the website, and it's of Charlie introducing the whole idea of the book, "The Enemy". They listened to that and also the opening extract from "The Dead". And some of them were genuinely terrified and worried about going to bed. So they were just saying, yeah I guess it's what we discussed earlier: "How scared do you get yourself with the ideas and the stories you're going to write?" I mean, even I guess before you're sitting down writing them, if you're thinking of the ideas, do you actually get scared?
- CH: Well you've got to, yes and as I say I had that thing, thinking "is this going to be too much for kids to handle" but you know, kids do like being scared and I'm very glad to hear that you were too scared to go to bed although I hope you are able to go to bed now. But you need to go through that, you need to experience a bit of safe fear in your lives because let's face it, there aren't going to be any zombies under your bed: or maybe just a small one. But yes, you've got to put yourself into that...you've got to become a scared kid yourself to write a book like this.
- JF: Another question from Came School: Conan Brown who says: "Charlie Higson...what's your pin number? Yes this is a serious question". So on you go.

CH: Well I don't think there's anyone watching this so yes my pin number is 666. Pin number of the beast.

JF: Thank you very much. Thanks for that question Conan.

CH: You nearly tricked me there, didn't you?

JF: Glasgow High School...Castlemill High School in Glasgow from Dead Forsyth, Charlie, "If you were a zombie, which celebrity would you want to eat"?

CH: "Which celebrity would I most like to eat"? Well initially you'd think maybe a supermodel because they're quite tasty but there's probably not much meat on a supermodel is there, you'd need something a bit plumper and you wouldn't want anyone too old, like me, because it would be a bit tough, so you'd go for someone young, reasonably fit, so it's good, healthy meat. And well, I'll tell you what, I met Jedward the other day, I did *never mind the Buzzcocks* and well that would be good because you'd get two for the price of one, like a supermarket deal. "This week at Tesco, Jedward, sliced into fillets."

JF: Is that a popular choice there audience, or are you Jedward fans? Do you want him to eat Jedward if he was a zombie?

Aud: Yeah.

JF: Yes?

Aud: Yes.

CH: Actually they would, they would be quite nice and quite fun. But I don't think too many people would complain if I ate Jedward.

JF: Now have you ever had a prank played on you, involving zombies?

CH: I don't think so, although actually for the, for the launch of *The Enemy* we played a prank on Chris Moyles who does a BBC breakfast show and we hired these two people who...their job is to go around dressing up as zombies. So we hired some of them to kind of ambush him at about six in the morning, on his way into Radio One, which was a bit of a risk because Chris Moyles can be a bit of a grumpy fellow and there was danger that he would just take the Mickey out the whole thing. But he generally a bit surprised and a bit shocked to be attack by zombies first thing in the morning. And he did...he mentioned it very nicely on his Radio show so luckily it went well but no, I don't think I've ever had zombies jump out on me.

JF: Good...

- CH: It will probably happen all the time now, won't it?
- JF: Yester Primary School in Haddington, In East Lothian- Hi there- their question Charlie is: "Do you base any of your books characters on yourself?"
- CH: In a way, writers base all the characters in all their books on themselves because in the end we're the only thing that we know. You know, as a person, your inside your own head the whole time and really you meet people and you get to know them but the thing...the person we know best is ourselves. And you out characters in the boom often who have aspects of you. You think in your worst, kind of darkest mood if I'm...if I was really going to be nasty I'd be like this and if I was going to be a little bit nice and heroic then I'd be like this. So yeah, you use aspects of yourself but then you also put...I don't ever base a character completely on one real person but I've got teenage boys so a lot of the characters in these books are based on their friends, and the sort of things they talk about and are interest in and so you kind of mix it all up in a big kind of stew and hope that you come up with some believable characters that the kids read in the book can kind of...would like to have as friends hopefully.
- JF: Well Charlie and zombies here, and watching out there, unbelievably we've come to the end of our time. Thank you so much for all your great questions and indeed, don't you think these guys have done extremely well, with their zombie outfits.
- CH: Yeah...well done. Well done with your outfits there.
- JF: Thank you. I'm still very scared by the guy in the front row. I'm extremely scared.
- CH: I know. I kept looking at him when I was talking and thinking "oh no. He's going to attack me any second now".
- JF: Thank you very much for all your brilliant questions and of course, we just say keep reading and of course, keep writing. The next author's live event is with the author Philip Pullman. That's on Thursday the 9th of December at eleven o'clock in the morning. Do hope you can join us for that. But in the mean time, we want a big zombie roar here from the folk here and wherever you're listening and watching thank you so much for joining us. A big cheer for Charlie Higson please Thank you.
- Aud: [Applause]