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Author/Interview subject: Darren Shan (DS)  
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)  
Other speakers: Audience (Aud) (Girl #)

JF: Hello there, happy New Year and a very warm welcome to the first of our Authors Live virtual events of 2013, hope you had a great holiday, back, full of enthusiasm for the new term and we're absolutely delighted that you have been brave enough, quite frankly, to join us today to hear the master of horror, yes, Darren Shan, talk about his new gut busting series Zom-B. Authors Live, you'll know this if you've been watching before is a series of virtual author events organised by the Scottish Book Trust in conjunction with BBC Scotland Learning and it's funded by Creative Scotland and I'm Janice Forsyth, I should say that! Hello! Lovely to see you, thanks for waving back.

Now as well as the tens of thousands of all of you watching right across the UK on Glow or in schools and libraries and all sorts of venues, we are really, really delighted to have with us today some real live pupils, we try to do this every time and they're from Holy Cross High School in Glasgow, so why don't you say hello to each other, they're really lovely and they're going to wave to you right now in the camera, on you go Holy Cross High School, aren't they lovely and shiny and neat and lovely, that's marvellous, however, I know another side to Holy Cross High School, they get totally into the vibe of these books, so here they are now waving in Zom-B fashion, go! How convincing are they? I'm terrified, I think probably our author is too!

Now before I ask Darren to take to the stage, let me tell you just a few facts about him, I could go on all day, but here are just a few, he sold a staggering number of books, at the last count, I'm sure it's gone up hugely since then, over 20 million, Whooooo!

Aud: Whooooo!

JF: Yes, you're impressed! Darren's first book for children Cirque Du Freak was published in 2000, the same year that some of our audience were born, that

doesn't make me feel old at all! His Demonata series was turned into a very successful manga adaptation by Japanese artist Takahiro Arai, I managed to say that properly, his fan based, yes, all of you, are so passionate, he even has a fan art section on his website. Darren himself owns over 4000 films, but he does sometimes leave the house to breathe normal fresh air, in fact, he loves going for walks in the great outdoors and you know something, he's about to walk on stage now. We're very excited, please give a huge, huge Authors Live welcome for the one, the only Darren Shan!

Aud: Whoooo!

DS: Thank you very much, thank you very much, thank you for coming along and thank you for tuning in wherever you are in the country. As I think you all know, I'm Darren Shan and I'm here this morning to talk zombies, specifically, I'm going to talk about Zom-B, which is my new series of 12 books about a teenager who gets sucked into the world of the undead. I'm going to tell you a little bit more about the books further on in this event, but I'm going to start off by diving straight into the prologue of the first book and I'm going to read it out live to you, it doesn't really need any set up, it pretty much explains itself as we go along. So, as I say, I'm going to talk about the books in a little bit, but let's start off with the prologue of the first Zom-B book.

It was the darkest, most wretched hour of the night when the dead came back to life and spread like monstrous locusts through the village of Pallaskenry, the luckier victims were slaughtered in their sleep, their skulls ripped open, their brains devoured, but others suffered a far more terrible fate. One of those, a boy called Brian Barry had enjoyed an ordinary Sunday night, he'd watched TV, finished his homework just before going to bed then settled down for a night of sweet dreams. Screams disturbed his slumber, at first he thought somebody was throwing a party, but as his head cleared he quickly realised this was no party. The screams were roars of genuine terror.

Looking out of his window, he spotted some of his neighbours fighting. He watched, awestruck and horrified as lovely Mrs Shanahan from across the road stabbed her son in the chest with a long, sharp butcher's knife. The son should have died instantly, as the knife had pierced his heart, but to Brian's astonishment he just yanked out the knife then fell on his mother with a bloodthirsty howl.

Brian turned away and rushed to his mum and dad's room to seek protection, but they weren't there. As if in a nightmare, Brian shuffled to the kitchen where he could see a light, pushing open the door he spotted his parents, but

he didn't call out to them, there was no point, his father would never hear anything again. His face had been ripped apart and his body was deathly still.

As for Brian's mother, she was busy eating his dad's brain. Brian watched sickly as she dug through the shredded remains of his face to scoop out the brains behind, mum had often joked about killing her husband, Brian and his dad had always laughed when she made her outlandish threats, but neither was laughing now.

Weeping softly, Brian backed away and fled into the night of blood and screams. He headed for the main street crying, moaning, shivering, he could see atrocities wherever he looked, corpses littering the road, neighbours, family members and friends feasting on the dead and tucking into their brains. It was as if a great madness had swept through the village anyone who tried to reason with the cannibalistic crazies was knocked down and torn apart. The only ones who stood any chance of survival were those who didn't stop to ask questions, who didn't try to help, who simply turned away and ran.

Brian somehow made it up the main street ducking challenges and skipping past the lunges of bloodthirsty abominations. At the top where the road branched, a tall man was standing feet spread wide, hands on hips calmly studying the violence. There were lots of undead creatures gathered at this point, scrapping with the living or feeding on the brains of the freshly killed, but none attacked the man in the middle of the road.

Brian saw his best chance of survival and launched himself at it slipping past the frenzied, shark-like killers he threw himself at the feet of the man who was immune to the attacks. He looked up and got ready to beg for his life, but when he saw the man's face, he paused, the tall man had enormous unsettling eyes, they were at least double the size of Brian's, the largest eyes the boy had ever seen, unnaturally white, with a tiny dark pupil set in the centre of each.

Yes, little boy, the man murmured. P...p...please Brian gasped, help, my dad's dead, my mum killed him and ate his brain! The man tutted, oh, how sad you have my sincere con condolences. As he was talking, one of the undead creatures darted at them, reaching for Brian drooling as it moved in for the kill. BACK! The man with the large eyes barked, the monster snarled at him, but retreated as ordered.

C...c...can you help me? Brian wheezed. The man frowned. I could, but with so many in your perilous position, it hardly seems fair that I should single you out for special treatment. P...p...please! Brian wailed, I haven't done anything wrong, I don't want to be eaten alive by zombies, please help me,

please! The tall man sighed and looked around he hesitated, then, decided to be merciful. Oh, very well, but I will only do it for you, the others will have to fend for themselves. Now, move back, kneel, close your eyes and pray. You'll help me if I kneel and pray? Brian asked. Oh, yes, the tall man smiled, it was a cold, strange little smile, but still it filled the terrified boy with hope.

O...okay, Brian said and he shuffled backwards the undead noticed this and started to move in for the kill. Brian gulped, then closed his eyes and began to pray manically. The tall man looked down tenderly on the praying boy, but then he spotted the monsters closing in and wiped the smile away. He would have to act swiftly if he was to honour his promise and spare the boy the agony of death at the hands of these foul creatures.

As Brian prayed, the tall man's hands snaked out, Brian didn't see the long, bony fingers and only barely felt them as they gripped his head and twisted sharply, left then right. He heard a sharp cracking noise, but he felt no pain and was dead before he knew it. The man let the corpse drop and bid Brian a silent farewell as the living dead moved in, he checked his watch, grunted, adjusted the ends of his sleeves, then started down the road into the village, leaving the undead leeches behind to carve up Brian Barry's skull and feast upon the hot sweet brain within. Yum yum!

So that was the prologue of Zom-B, the first book in my Zom-B series, as you can tell, B does not stand for Brian Barry, who doesn't get much further than the prologue. In chapter one, the action moves to London, which is where most of the books in the series will be set and we're introduced to our narrator, B Smith, an ordinary teenager in most respects except one. B's dad is a very vocal outright racist and with Zom-B, on the one hand, I wanted to tell a big exciting action packed brain munching series about the living dead, but I also wanted to explore things, like, racism and the abuse of power. I hope it's a book that will excite you and intrigue you, but I also hope they will provoke thought and discussion and so I wanted to explore what it would be like to grow up in a household where racism is the norm, how that would affect you and if you could stand up to it, what it would be like if you had to take a stand against a person you loved most in the whole world.

So it's a very dark troubling book which deals with both zombie brain eating and much more realistic issues, it's a strange sort of mix up, but those who have read my earlier books will know I always like doing different things with the creatures I write about. My vampire books, the vampires were unlike any other vampires, in my Demonata series, the demons were a totally whole new take on demons and similarly in my zombie series, I want to come at zombies from a different angle. Yes, there are the traditional brain munching, brain dead zombies who exist only to kill and who have don't have any thoughts or

feelings, but there are other creatures in the mix and there are other types of zombies in the mix and as the series goes on, we're going to uncover layer after layer of this very menacing world. So that's a little introduction to the series, as I said, there will be 12 books in total, the first two have come out already, Zom-B and Zom-B Underground, I'm going to read you out an extract of the Zom-B Underground at the end of today's event and I'm going to introduce you to one of my favourite characters from the entire series, one of the most spine tingling characters I've ever come up with.

The third book Zom-B city is coming out in the middle of March and the rest of the books are coming out roughly at a rate of one every three months. With Zom-B the way it's structured is it's short books released very, very quickly, there are lots and lots of cliff hangers, I'm, sort of, going back to the way Charles Dickens used to write, where he would release his books a few chapters at a time and it creates this great sense of anticipation while you're waiting for the next chunk to come out. So Zom-B, rather than do a couple of big books a year, I'm going to do four short books, with lots of cliff hangers that will hopefully get you really excited and wait and see what happens next!

So I hope I've wetted your appetite for Zom-B, now I know lots of you have questions, here in the audience and also all around the rest of the country. So I'm going to move to the chair and Janice is going to come back and we're going to take some questions and, yeah, have a bit of fun, hopefully!

JF: Thank you very much, a big round of applause for Darren, thank you very much, thank you!

Aud: [Clapping]

JF: It's quite an atmosphere you created there, we're all, sort of, like coming into it like that, we can see the pictures that you're creating with words it's quite amazing!

DS: It's one of my favourite scenes to read out, yeah, because it's a real ice breaker!

JF: Yeah, I thought you were enjoying it! Was it an ice breaker for you?

Aud: Yeah.

JF: Yes, it was, was it an ice breaker for you? Yes, all of you as well too. Right, first of all we're going to hear a couple of questions from the people we have here and I should say, Holy Cross High School, I said in Glasgow, of course it's not in Glasgow, it's in Hamiton, isn't it?!

Aud: Yes.

JF: Yes, Holy Cross High School in Hamilton. So, first of all, we're going to hear from Olivia who is over here and she is going to wait for the little microphone and what's your question?

Girl 1: Yeah, was there a certain person or thing that helped you become an author?

JF: So the question is was there a certain person or thing that helped you, Darren, become an author, thanks Olivia.

DS: Yeah. I always get a bit embarrassed answering this question, because it sounds very, very corny, but it is a truth, so I've got to be truthful. The person who had the biggest impact on me becoming a writer was my mummy!

JF: Ah!

DS: My mum was a teacher and she taught me to read and write and she was the first person to encourage me to use my imagination and to tell stories and she was always really, really encouraging, even though I loved writing horrific gory little stories, even when I was five or six, she never stopped me doing that, even though she had no interest in horror herself, she could see that it was stimulating my imagination and she thought that was a good thing and she always give me the freedom to write what I wanted to write and was always very, very helpful, so, yeah, she's been the single biggest influence in my life.

JF: Great question, ah, let's hear it for mums, hey!

DS: Ah!

JF: Yeah, we've gone all sappy from zombies, haven't we?!

DS: It won't last long!

JF: I know! I'm going to get a question from Anderson who is in the front row here, hi Anderson.

Boy 1: Do you think in the future, there could be a zombie uprising?

JF: Ah, Anderson is asking does Darren think that in the future there could be a zombie uprising.

DS: I think there could be if it was orchestrated. Very often in zombie movies and books, it doesn't explain where the zombies have come from, they just suddenly appear out of nowhere or there might be some little explanation like, oh, a meteor passed overhead or scientists were experimenting with something, but they usually don't go into details. I wanted to, in this series, try to explain how a

zombie uprising could happen and why it would happen and who might profit from orchestrating such an uprising. So it's actually one of the key things of the series as we go along. The first three books, we've got no sense of what's going on, we know zombies are running wild, but we don't know why, we don't know how, we don't know where they're coming from. As the series develops we will find out and, as I say, it is one of the key themes of the whole series.

JF: Aha, great question, thank you Anderson. And we have this question now from Ridgepark School in South Lanarkshire, hi there, hope you're all watching and this is...the first question is, would you like any of your Demonata books to be made into a film and if the answer is yes, which one?

DS: Oh, good question! I would love...well Demonata was a series of 10 books and, yeah, the books in the series could stand individually, so if only one of them wants to be made into a film, it would have to be Lord Loss, the first book in the series, which is one of my favourite books that I wrote. I hope there will be a Demonata series one day, there's nothing in the pipeline at the moment, there are a couple of problems with the Demonata, one is it's very, very bloody, a bit like my Zom-B series, I don't think that's a major problem, because you can get away with that in films and TV, but the other problem is, it's very, very complicated in its structure, the books are simple to read, you can read each book at a time and when you're reading them, a picture builds up nice and gradually, but if you try to explain it to people it's awkward, because there are three narrators, the story line moves backwards and forwards in time, it's my most ambitious series, you know, it takes in all sorts of things from, you know, demon attacks to the nature of the universe and where we've all come from and the structure of time, it's a really fun, exciting, blood drenched series and it's also, like Zom-B, it's one that's designed to hopefully make readers think a lot, so hopefully there will be a film or a TV show one day, but nothing is lined up just yet.

JF: I think that sounds like a perfect picture of a film actually, all of that, yeah! I think we can see that, can't we? We can cope with three narrators, yeah! Thank you very much for that question and this next one comes from Belmont House School in Glasgow from James who is 13, hi James, and James asks a good one, I was thinking this when you were doing the reading, how do you get to sleep at night after writing this all day?!

DS: [Laughs] Hi James! I actually sleep very, very soundly, the great thing about being a horror writer is you spend your working days thinking about all these horrific things, so by the time I get to bed at night, I'm all horrified out! I think it

would be like if you spent all day laughing, you're probably not going to have dreams about funny things!

JF: So no nightmares for you.

DS: No, which is a shame, because I loved having nightmares, when I was a child, I would lie in bed at night and think of scary things to try to give myself nightmares, because I loved horror, I love the sense of being afraid, I love going on a roller coaster ride, that climb up the first slope and the sudden drop and the good thing about horror is it's a safe form of being scared, horror books and horror movies are make believe, we pretend they're real to give ourselves that extra bit of thrill, but we know deep down they're not and so even though a really good horror book might give you nightmares, it's still, I think a safe form of being scared, it's a fun way of being scared.

JF: Okay, you've convinced me! McLaren High School in Stirling have been in touch and this question is, what was your inspiration for the dad in Zom-B?

DS: Oh, that's a very good question, McLaren High School! Zom-B all started with me wanting to write a book in response to what has been going on in the world over the last 12 or so years particularly, in particular the 9/11 attacks in America and the 7/7 bombings in London. I live in Ireland, despite my accent I've spent most of my life there, but I also have a flat in London and back when the bombings took place, my flat was in the East End, very close to where one of the bombs went off and the East End of London is a great place, it's a real mixing pod of different cultures and races, I love it over there, but after the bombings, you could sense the tension and fear in the air and there were other people cashing in on that fear and telling people, yes, they need to be even more afraid than they are and I wanted to write a book in response to that, that dealt with racism, that dealt with the manipulation of the media and power and so it became Zom-B. I didn't want to do it in a preaching way, I wanted it to be a fun entertaining read, but that as where it all started out from and so B's dad is something of a caricature, but I felt we need to start with just one person who was totally abhorrent.

JF: And with somebody like that, a character like that, when you're building it up, do you maybe take elements from different people that you perhaps see, you know, you're riding a bus, you might overhear somebody, do you build it up from all sorts of elements?

- DS: Absolutely, everything in Zom-B, all the racist elements are based on things I have seen and experienced over the years, so, yeah, there's a lot of fiction in Zom-B.
- JF: Of course.
- DS: But unfortunately, the racist side, the angry bitter side, that's has its roots in reality.
- JF: But that's so I think for everyone watching this and listening to this today who maybe want to write, it's the idea of something that's fantasy based zombies and horror, but at the same time you're exploring real life things and, you know, people should carry a notebook, make recordings, just be observing all the time if they're interested in writing, shouldn't they?
- DS: Absolutely, no matter what sort of story you write, I love fantasy and science fiction and horror, but a really good horror fantasy sci-fi book is always dealing with reality, it might be doing it with aliens, it might be doing it with demons, but it is always rooted in reality and what we experience in day to day life, but what I love about it is, it lets us reflect on our day to day lives, but have a lot of fun at the same time!
- JF: Yeah. Thank you for that question McLaren High School in Stirling. This is from Kilmarnock Academy's, it's first year book club, Darren, hello there, they say, we've been arguing over whether it would be better...this is a great one! This is a really good question, whether it would be better to avoid a zombie apocalypse or just to become a zombie, what would you rather do?
- DS: That is a very good question! Well, my series, as I said earlier on, the Zom-B's aren't all like the traditional zombies, most are, most are just brain dead shuffling around creatures who exist solely to eat brains, but there are other zombies in the mix who manage to hold on to their mental faculties, but still have to eat brains! And in many ways, I think that's the most distressing state of all, which is why obviously that's what I focus on when I come to write the books, because I thought, how horrible would it be if you did become a zombie and you had to eat brains to survive, but you still thought and felt and knew what you were doing and felt revulsion for what you were doing and I thought, you know, how crazy would that be? How distressing would that? And that's the perfect root for a horror story.
- JF: But what would you rather do?
- DS: I'm a fighter, so I'd rather survive and take my chances!

JF: Okay, you're very brave! Now, this is from Atherton Community School in Manchester, is it true that you started school when you were just three and were you the youngest in your whole school?

DS: Yes, hello Manchester, I was up there on my last tour, I think last October, so I had a great time there! Yes, as I said, my mother was a teacher and when I was a young child, you'll find it hard to believe now, but I was a very, very unruly child.

JF: No!

DS: Everybody hated me, I would chase other children around, I was a gleeful wrecking ball, I think it was all done in high spirits, but, yeah, I was a wrecking ball, nonetheless, and so my mum was really worried about sending me to a preschool, because she just thought, oh, he's going to get in trouble all the time, he's going to get in fights, I'm going to have to be going in and out to sort out his problems and she was discussing this with the headmistress at her school and the headmistress said, ah, it's no problem, he can come and start here! This is back in the 1970's, when things were a bit more relaxed than they are today.

JF: Yeah.

DS: So I wasn't officially on the books, but, yeah, I did start school when I was three.

JF: So you were the youngest there.

DS: Yeah, I was a couple of years younger than everybody else!

JF: You were a special case, I won't ask whether you stopped being a wrecking ball! Possibly not!

DS: No, they slowed me down, but they didn't stop me entirely!

JF: Now we have this from Leighton James, so I think it's also at the same school, who says, do you think you are the master of horror or do you just say it? Do you really think it or is it just a good thing to describe yourself as?

DS: Do I wake up every morning and look in the mirror and go, *I am the master of horror!*

JF: Oh, go on, say you do!

DS: It would be fun if I did, but, no, that's just a term my publishers came up with.

JF: Right.

DS: I actually...I am a horror writer, but I'm not just a horror writer, because my first series of books were about vampires, they were sold as horror books, I don't think they were, The Saga of Darren Shan was, above and beyond all else, an action adventure series, my vampires were not evil killers, it was exploring them almost in a sociological way, looking at what it would be like if you had to live for centuries and had to drink blood to survive and could only come out at night, but they weren't monsters, they lived by these very strict codes of conduct, I based them on the samurai and the ancient Celts and the native American Indians, but, you know, they weren't really horror books, but because they were about vampires, they got sold as horror books and I don't mind that, because I love horror and my Demonata series is a horror series, Zom-B is a horror series. I love horror, but I think it's always important to take it in new directions and to do more of it than just try to scare people.

When I was a teenager and taking my first tentative steps into the world of being a writer, I would fill my stories with as much gore and guts as I could squeeze into them, because I thought that's what made a good story and it's not. When you read my books there are actually very few chapters where it does explode into out and out violence, when I does, it usually gets right there on the edge, but a good story is all about creating characters you can care about, creating a story line that you're interested in and we've launched different elements together, so horror needs to be used sparingly if it's going to be truly horrific.

JF: Having said all of that, I like to imagine you walking around wearing a leather jacket with Master of Horror on the back of it! That's just my idea! Right...!

DS: Funny, when I was in my late teens, early 20's, I was much hairier, I had big long hair, I had a big bush beard, I used to wear a big long leather jacket down to my feet, I looked very fearsome, this is when I was at university in London, but we also had a little pet Pomeranian, so I'd be walking through the streets with this tiny toy dog on a lead and looking like something out of the Adam's family!

JF: I hope there are photographs of that on your website!

DS: I've destroyed them all!

JF: He's destroyed the evidence! Now also from Manchester, Ben says, why do you have a pen name, so Darren isn't your real name?

DS: Darren is.

JF: Right.

DS: Shan is a shorter version of my real name which is O'Shaughnessy.

JF: Aha!

DS: It's normally pronounced O'Shornacy over here or O'Shocknasy! But on the west coast of Ireland, where I live, we usually say O'Shaughnessy and my grandfather was always referred to in his life, even by his children, as Paddy Shan. Now I actually write books for adults as well as children and the first book I ever published, I released it under my real name, Darren O'Shaughnessy and I decided back then that I wanted to write for children under a different name, these days I write for both, because I'm an established author and we can make it clear that this book is for children, this book is for adults, but I felt when I was starting out that there would be confusion, so I decided to use a different name for Cirque Du Freak and Darren Shan popped into my head and I'm delighted it did, because I've signed 10's and 100's of 1000's of books over the last 12 years and if had to write Darren O'Shaughnessy every time, my hand would have dropped off a long, long time ago!

JF: Oh yeah! Oh, no, it's a cracking name, Darren Shan, and I can imagine people getting mixed up with the spelling of your real surname and so on, so, yeah, it's a gooden.

DS: Yeah, so if anyone is going to take a pen name, make it a short one!

JF: Yeah. This comes from Mr Lewis who is a teacher in Chipping Sodbury, hello Mr Lewis and he says, what is the most frightening book or most terrifying scene in a book that you've ever read?

DS: Oh, I'm glad he should ask about books that I've read, because I can identify it instantly, it's in Salem's Lot, a book by Stephen King, which is a book all about vampires taking over a modern day town, it's one of the first adult horror books I ever read and there's a scene in it where a boy gets turned into a vampire and when he comes back from the grave, he immediately goes to try and turn his best friends into vampires as well and in one of the scenes, this boy wakes up in bed in the middle of the night and he's on the second floor of a house and he's dead friend is tapping at the window saying, let me in, let me in and that gave me nightmares when I read it years and years ago and it's one of those scenes which has stuck in my head forever!

JF: Wow! Great question and I think it reminds us that if you want to be a good writer, read as much as possible, clearly Stephen King...

DS: Absolutely, it all starts with reading, I don't think there's a writer out there who didn't love reading before they become a writer.

JF: Yeah, fantastic, thank you very much for answering those questions, we're very sorry if you asked a brilliant question we didn't have time to get around to, but keep an eye on The Scottish Book Trust website and we'll maybe filter back some of Darren's answers to other questions, but you're going to give us a final reading now aren't you, Darren?

DS: I am, yes!

JF: Fantastic!

DS: That flew by!

JF: It did fly by, I know, time flies when you're having great time!

DS: I thought we were only about five minutes into it! Yeah, well, thank you for all that, thanks for those great questions! My favourite part, when I tour around, is the questions and answers, because when I do the readings, I obviously read out the same thing every time, but with questions, I never know what's coming next and it keeps me on my toes.

I'm going to read out a scene, to finish up with, from Zom-B Underground, which is the second book in the series, it's the book that's currently on sale, I think it went on sale at the start of January. All of this book is set underground, befitting of the title! And in this book, B has been held in an underground complex, I'm not going to say why, but B has been held with a group of other teenagers and they're being experimented on by soldiers and scientists. In the scene I'm going to read out, B has been held in isolation for a few days, locked away in a little cell cut off from everybody else completely and B is undergoing a mental and physical breakdown to do with the experiments which are being conducted and B things the end is nigh, but then a very unexpected visitor pays B a call and everything changes in a most unusual and frightening way.

I'm in my cell, lying on the bed, I'm in bad shape, my head throbs and my fingers tremble wildly, I had the dry heaves a while ago, I tried exercise and keeping active, but now it hurts too much when I move. I think I'm close to the end, all I want is to shut my eyes and drift off, to be honest, I don't care if I never regain consciousness.

There's a screeching sound from the corridor outside and I jam my hands over my ears, I've been hearing all sorts of things in the last few minutes, explosions, tearing metal, screams, I'm sure they're not real, it's just my brain cascading out of control warping every day sounds. As I'm shaking my head, wishing I was dead, the door to my room slides open, the sounds outside amplify immediately

and I wince, glancing up expecting a soldier or a scientist, but whoever it is, he's standing in the corridor not showing his face, I can see his shadow, but that's all.

Don't be shy! I growl, come on in and have a good look, the man giggles, it's a strange jangly sound, I start to sit up angry, but then the man steps inside and I sink back the confusion, the fear and disgust, it's a clown, but no clown that you would ever see in a circus, he's dressed in a blood stained pin striped suit, a severed face hangs from either shoulder, each face has been freshly skinned from the bone, lengths of gut are wound around his arms and legs glistening and dripping, he's wearing a pair of oversized shoes and there's a small human skull sticking out of the end of each. The clown's hair has been sourced from a variety of heads, there are all sorts of locks, every type of colour, shade and length all stuck to his skull, no, no not stuck, as he comes closer and giggles again, he bends slightly and I see that clumps of hair are actually stapled to his skull, the clown has a painted white face, the flesh around his eyes has been carved away and filled in with soot, his lips have been painted a dark blue colour, instead of the usual clown's red ball over his nose, he's somehow attached a human eye to it, I do nothing as the surreal clown advances, I'm frozen in place, praying that this is an illusion, a product of my fevered brain, but it just doesn't look like a dream figure, I'm convinced that he's real.

The clown hops from foot to foot, still giggling, drawing closer, now, I spot a badge on his chest, round and colourful, the sort a child might paint, daubed on the badge in ragged hand writing is what I assume to be his name, Mr Dowling.

He reaches the foot of my bed and beams at me, lips closed, eyes wide, looking crazier and more menacing than anything I've ever seen in my life, his eyes twitch continuously from one side of the sockets to the other, his skin is wriggling as if insects are burrowing about beneath the flesh, close to the surface, I want to kick out at the nightmarish clown or slide past him and race for the exit, but I can't move, it's like I'm locked down tight with fear.

The clown reaches out and strokes my right cheek, his fingers are long and thin, much of the flesh has been sliced away from them, a glimpse of bones from a mish mash of exposed veins and arteries, withdrawing his hand, the clown, Mr Dowling, leans over until his face is directly in front of mine, his eyes steady for a moment and he looks straight at me. The clown's smile spreads, his eyes start dancing again, he opens his mouth and dozens of spiders fall from his blue lips, a rain of living arachnids small and scuttly, hundreds of legs scrape my face as they pour over my eyes, into my mouth and up my nose.

With a scream of shock and terror, I hurl myself from the bed and roll across the floor swiping spiders from my face, mashing them to pieces with the heels of my hands, spitting them out, picking them from my eyes, screaming over and over and over. I shake my head and wipe my hands across my scalp, brushing the last of the spiders away, some scurry across the floor seeking the shelter of the shadows beneath the bed. With a shudder I stand, squash a few more spiders underfoot and turn to face the other worldly clown, but he isn't there. If he was really in the first place, and I probably wouldn't think that he was, if not for the spiders, which I can still see all around me, but he slipped out while I wasn't looking and he left the door open.

I call out shakily, hello! There's no answer, but the noises outside are louder than ever, the screams especially and I no longer think that they're a product of my skewed senses. Stealing myself against every sort of imaginable horror, I edge closer to the open doorway, I keep thinking it will slam shut, but it doesn't and seconds later, I ease out of my cell, into the corridor and the middle of a blood red storm.

And you'll have to read Zom-B Underground to find out what happens next! As I said, there are lots and lots cliff hangers in the Zom-B series, so there are many scenes like this or even worse! Well, I hope you've enjoyed your meeting with Darren Shan today! I hope that's wetted your appetite for Zom-B, as I said, there'll be 12 books in total and they come out every three months, so it's fast and furious all the way from now through to the summer of 2015, when I'm finally going to rest, put my feet up and relax! Until then it's full undead steam ahead, cheers!

JF: A big round of applause please for Darren, thank you very much!

Aud: [Clapping]

JF: Oh! I am going to have nightmares tonight, thank you for that, not! I guess we're all thinking we never want to meet Mr Dowling in real life and just before I go, I wanted to mention the teacher ambassador project that The Scottish Book Trust are running alongside these Authors Live events, two schools McLaren High, we heard questions from McLaren High today in Callander and Alva Academy are using Darren's books to base classwork on, this is really cool, Alva's English department are working with the art department on exploring character while McLaren High are having zombie science lessons.

DS: [Laughs]

JF: It wasn't like that in my day! And they're learning survival techniques in geography and zombie escape techniques in PE that is brilliant! And you can find out how they got on at the Scottish Book Trust website as well as reading about how schools use the poetry slam that we had to run rap battles in class or indeed how the Roald Dahl events that took place recently changed lunch times! You'll be able to download for free all the learning resources to support each of these Authors Live events as well as all the previous events to watch again, if you missed any of them with Charlie Higson, David Armand, the rap battle, all on that website, [scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive](http://scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive).

So after the Zom-B apocalypse and the blood and guts of today's events, the next Authors Live is going to be something very, very different, we're setting sail with Arthur's dreamboat and long nosed puppets, that is very different, isn't it? On the 24th of April, that's an event for nursery to P three pupils, so do spread the word about that, tune in again if you wish. So remember stay vigilant, avoid brain eating zombies and if you see the sinister Mr Dowling, join me and just run for the hills. From everyone at Holy Cross High School in Hamilton here with us today in Glasgow and Darren, thank you very much for watching. Another big cheer for Darren, thank you very much.

DS: Bye!

Aud: [Cheers and claps]