

Date:

Author/Interview subject: Patrick Ness

Interviewed by: Bryan Burnett

Other speakers:

BB: Hello, I'm Bryan Burnett and this is Authors Live. In a moment we'll be meeting the multi award-winning author Patrick Ness who'll be talking about his latest novel, *More Than This*, as well as answering as many of your questions as we can fit into this chat. Helping me to welcome Patrick are a specially selected, handpicked group of pupils from around the country. First of all we've got Holy Rood High who are with us. We've got Kyle Academy, we have got McLaren High, and also Wester Hailes Education Centre, good to have you all with us. And of course across the country thousands of you watching and today we want to give a big shout out to Larbert High School and Ellen Academy; welcome all of you. [applause]

Patrick Ness is the award-winning author of the *Chaos Walking* trilogy and his books for young adults include *A Monster Calls*, and more recently *More Than This*. Patrick was born in America but is now a British citizen living in London. He's won just about every award going including the prestigious Carnegie Medal twice. He's been described as the greatest young adult fiction writer of his generation. His books are challenging, provocative and gripping. The telegraph newspaper said he was electrifying. The Irish Times said he was enthralling and the Daily Mail said his books were a public health hazard. Let's find out why as we welcome Patrick Ness.

PN: Thank you. Hello.

BB: Great to have you here, Patrick.

PN: Thanks very much.

BB: Grab a seat. We're going to hear from you in a second or two with a bit of reading. But let me ask you, I mentioned reviews there; do you care about what other people say about your work?

PN: I do to a point but after I spend a year writing a book it's like a kid you're sending off to college. You've done all that you can for it, you've done your best, you've made all kinds of mistakes, you love it anyway and then you send it off to college. So I'm interested to hear what people say, really, really interested to hear their reactions. But I feel how I feel about it, and I think that's good because you can't take bad reviews to heart, but you can't take good reviews to heart either. You can't have somebody telling you you're a genius all the time or your writing will just be awful. So a little but you've got to try and have your own opinion about your own stuff.

BB: When you get feedback from critics and more importantly from your readers does that influence that you write for your next one?

PN: No, and it really can't. You've got to absolutely tell the story that you want to tell. I mean does anybody here want to be a writer? Put your hand up if you want to be...you weren't expecting a question, were you? Yeah, there's a couple of you. What kind of writer? You, right there in the...what kind of writer would you like to be?

BB: Let's get a microphone to you and we'll find out.

Boy: Not really sure.

PN: That's okay, that's actually a pretty good answer, that's okay. That's a pretty good answer. In fact, if I had been here in your grade and someone had asked me live on television I wouldn't have put my hand up at all. And that's okay, so good on you for putting your hand up. He's not even looking at me, and that's okay too. But if you want to write a book, the advice I always give, because the number one advice you can get that you should take for writing a book is write a book that you want to read yourself. Because you'll be amazed at how many people don't do that. They think there's a lot of vampire books, I better write one of those. There's a lot of dystopias, I better write one of those. And the thing is, nobody was looking...I always say this, nobody was looking for the first Harry Potter, and if you had described Harry Potter to a publisher before you wrote it nobody would've bought it. She just wanted to write a book, a story she wanted to tell. The same with Twilight, the same with Hunger Games, and nobody wanted those books in the first place. It was just somebody telling a story they were dying to tell. And I call that joy. If you can write a story with joy that you are really excited to tell, no matter how strange the story is, people are going to respond. And those are the books that sell, those are the books that get published, those are the books that people want to read.

- BB: When you were this age did you know what kind of writer you wanted to be?
- PN: I didn't. In fact, I didn't even know that you could be a writer. I didn't even know that you could do that as a job. I thought it was always going to be a hobby. In fact, in that dumb logic I thought that only famous people become writers, which doesn't make any sense. But I come from a really small town; I had a really poor upbringing. Nobody in my school did anything like write novels or have a public face kind of thing. But I did it anyway. So I thought I would have to get another job and I did get other jobs, but I didn't think I could be a fulltime writer until I got my first book deal which was very exciting, quite late.
- BB: We hear lots of use of the phrase a struggling. Was it a struggle for you and is it a good life now?
- PN: I mean it's always a struggle and it's always good. I mean if you get a chance to do what you want as a job, that's just...I never ever listen to an author complain about anything. I mean I really, really don't. I mean I'm not going down a mine, I'm not making minimum wage. I mean I'm so lucky to be able to do what I do. It's still a struggle but I try not to complain. That would be tempting fate.
- BB: And I guess you have to like your own company if you're a fulltime author.
- PN: [laughs] How do you answer that question? Yes, I love my own company! I'm just fantastic company for myself. Yeah, it's maybe a temperament thing. I like not having a boss, I think that's what it comes down to. I like not having a boss to answer to, I like being my own schedule setting, my own...I do my own evaluations, that kind of thing. That's what I like.
- BB: So now everyone's thinking that's the kind of job I want...
- PN: It's a good job.
- BB: I definitely want to be a writer.
- PN: And it's important to say if you want to be a writer you can. Nobody ever told me that, nobody ever came to my school and said this is how you could do it or it's a possible job. But it really is. I've made my living writing books for teenagers, I've written books for adults, I've written for radio, I've written the screenplay of *A Monster Calls*. There are all kinds of ways you can make your living as a writer. Journalism, advertising, all kinds of ways.
- BB: Because our dream here today is that someone watching or someone here with us hears you speak and thinks I'm going to go home and write something and

write something of note. But you never had that experience when you were young?

PN: Not really. I mean looking back, not really. I kept it really secret, I kept it really private like I said I wouldn't have put my hand up. But you're making eye contact now, that's good. Oh, he looked away, he just looked away! I kept it secret because I didn't think it was... I thought it was slightly embarrassing, which is funny looking back, but it was like saying you were going to audition for the Voice or something. And I don't know, I always did it, and I think that's a good sign of a writer. I always did it no matter what anybody told me, because spite is a really, really good motivation for writing. Somebody telling you, you can't write, somebody telling you, you can't write something in particular, just say watch me and do it anyway; that's good motivation. Never underestimate spite.

BB: Patrick's latest novel is *More Than This*, we're going to talk about that and some of you have read it and we're going to get some questions. It's an absolutely gripping novel but it also talks about perhaps some of the biggest questions that we'll ever think about in our life. Before we talk about it, will you read a bit for us?

PN: Yeah, I'll read the first couple of pages. I like to stand when I read, so I'm not trying to do a power thing over you all now. But I'm wearing purple, like this school in front. I'm only wearing this purple because it's the most trim looking shift I have, so everything else makes me look fat. So I'm going to read just the opening two and a half pages, because I don't actually like being read to, and I think it's because I was in quite a religious family, so they would often read every bedtime story as if it was the bible. So you'd get the very hungry caterpillar. So I like reading on my own, so this will probably be too fast and it's very short, it's two and a half pages. So it's just the very opening of *More Than This*.

Here's the boy, drowning. In these last moments it's not the water that's finally done for him, it's the cold. It's split all the energy from his body and contracted his muscles into a painful uselessness, no matter how much he fights to keep himself above the surface. He's strong and young, nearly 17, but the wintry waves keep coming, each one seemingly larger than the last. They spin him round, topple him over, force him deeper, down and down. Even when he can catch his breath in the few terrified seconds he manages to push his face into the air, he's shaking so badly he can barely get half a lungful before he's under again. It isn't enough, grows less each time and he feels a terrible yearning in his chest as he aches fruitlessly for more. He's in full panic now; he knows he's drifted just slightly too far from shore to make it back, the icy tide pulling him out farther and farther with every wave, pushing him towards the rocks that make this bit of coast so treacherous.

He also knows there's no one who'll notice he's gone in time. No one who'll raise the alarm before the water defeats him. He won't be saved by chance either; there are no beach combers or tourists to dive in from the shoreline to save him. Not this time of year, not in these freezing temperatures. It is too late for him. He will die and he will die alone. The sudden gasping of knowing this makes him panic even more. He tries again to break the surface, not daring to think that this might be his last time, not daring to think much at all. He forces his legs to kick, forces his arms to heave himself upward to at least get his body the right way around to try and grasp another breath just inches away. But the current is too strong, it allows him tantalising near the surface but spins him upside down before he can get there, dragging him closer to the rocks. The waves toy with him as he tries again and fails.

Then without warning the game the sea seems to have been playing, the cruel game of keeping him just alive enough to think he might make it. That game seems to be over. The current surges, slamming him into the killingly hard rocks, his right shoulder snaps in two so loudly he can hear the crack even under water, even in this rush of tide. The mindless intensity of the pain is so great that he calls out, his mouth instantly filling with freezing briny seawater. He coughs against it but only drags more into his lungs. He curves into the pain of his shoulder, blinded by it, paralysed by its intensity. He's unable to even try and swim now, unable to brace himself as the waves turn him over once more.

Please is all he thinks. Just the one word echoing through his head. Please. The current grips him a final time, it rears back as if to throw him and it dashes him head first into the rocks. He slams into them with the full furious weight of an angry ocean behind him. He's unable to even raise his hands to try and soften the blow. The impact is just behind his left ear. It fractures his skull, splintering it into his brain, the force of it also crushing his third and fourth vertebrae, severing both his cerebral artery and his spinal cord, an injury from which there is no return, no recovery, no chance. He dies.

Chapter one. [chuckles] That's happy, isn't it? It's a knock about comedy, that one, yeah.

BB: It's quite a beginning and to kill of the main character before you've even got to chapter one, was that a risky thing to do for you? It must have been quite brave to do that.

PN: I never want to think in terms of brave when I'm writing because then you start patting yourself on your back, you think oh, I'm just so brave. And that's awful. You can't think too much of yourself as a writer and it should always be a

struggle, there should always be doubts, you should always be trying something that's scary and nervous, makes you nervous. And it just felt right. He wakes up, he's called Seth; he wakes up, no idea where he is. It's a completely abandoned world; it turns out to be the neighbourhood where he was raised but not the neighbourhood where he lives. And the first part of the book is a question; it's where is he? What is this place? And part two purposely answers the question. It says this is where you are; this is the young adult adventure, exciting plot that explains why you are here in this place. And then part three of the book says are you sure? Are you absolutely sure that what you've been told is true? And how much does that matter and how do you live with not being sure? So it needed a punch of an opening, and I like a punch of an opening because it tells me the author is taking me seriously and wants me to come somewhere with them.

BB: Did you sit down with a blank piece of paper and type that stunning first line; here is the boy drowning, or did that come after?

PN: No, I mean I tend not to start my books until I know the first and last lines, because the last line especially is super important. The last line is the dismount, and it has to be right or you've messed up everything that's gone before, so no pressure. Very smirky. The first line, I usually like to have that first. But I knew that he would drown and I knew that it would be from this beach. But I couldn't quite get it and I worked at it and I worked at it. I knew that there was something there. I tried in different ways and it just kept getting shorter and shorter and shorter until I thought of the line here as the boy drowning, and I thought ah, that's it, that's the tone of the book, that's where we need to start, that's it.

And then after that those pages only needed to be two and a half pages, rather than everything that I'd written. Because I thought okay, that's what I want and we need to move on. It needs to be a punch and then off we go.

BB: Rachel from Kyle Academy's got a question about the structure of that book.

Girl: Do you ever think about the whole ending of the book before you start writing the rest of it?

PN: Well, do you write yourself?

Girl: No.

PN: Do you want to write?

Girl: I'm not sure.

PN: That's okay, that's also a fine answer. I don't like that you have to choose your career when you're 15. I think there's time to figure stuff out. But I always know the last sentence, but that's different than knowing the whole end of the book. I call it the exit feeling; it's how I want the reader to leave the book, and I often don't know how I'm going to get there. But in *More Than This* for example the last sentence is five words, and the whole book I think is in those five words. That's what I think the whole book is about. So it gives me something to head towards but I don't always know how I'm going to get there; in fact often I don't. So enough that I don't feel lost, but also not so much that I can't create along the way.

BB: Were you one of those people who peaked at the end of a book when you were young?

PN: I didn't, not when I was young. I do it now, it's a weird thing, I get really nervous now. I get so anxious, I think oh, god, is it going to turn out okay? And I'm terrible at television as well, I'll be watching...I've read most of the *Game of Thrones* so I know what's happening so I can watch that. But often if I'm watching a show and it's really distressing tense I'll look up the summary on Wikipedia, just to make sure everybody turns out alright. And that's terrible, that's a terrible habit, don't do that. That's a terrible habit. So I try not to but occasionally sometimes.

BB: You tackle some really weighty, some really dark subjects in your writing. Do you get told your books are unsuitable for young adults?

PN: I get told the books are unsuitable by adults, by people who don't know what they're talking about. And I do get asked a lot about my material and my books. But my answer is that if all you have to do is read what teenagers write themselves, I mean I've read some of the stuff you've written and gosh, it's far darker and far more harrowing and full of all kinds of things we probably can't even say on a live webcast. And that's okay. What I wrote as a teenager that's what I wrote and that's fine and being a teenager is difficult and it's about finding what matters and finding what you believe and finding your boundary and pushing at it. And crossing it and seeing what crossing it feels like. And I think that's vitally important but teenagers write darker stuff than I'd ever be allowed to publish. And I think the immoral thing is to pretend that that's not true. It's to pretend that I need to somehow teach a lesson and that a book should have a happy ending.

I did have somebody once ask me, somebody who truly believed that all books for teenagers must have happy endings. I'm said how many teenagers do you know? I think that if tell the truth about what's difficult and what's hard, which is

what I wanted to read when I was a teenager, if I tell the truth about that, then when I also tell the truth about what's good and what's possible. And that's things like friendship and trust and counting on somebody and learning to live with uncertainty, then I think it's more believable because I haven't lied about what's dark. And I'm not going to abandon a young reader to face all that themselves. I think that's the immoral position. I think you have to engage, because you've all got the internet. And that seems like a glib sentence but yeah, you're all looking at stuff that might be slightly too old for you, I don't want to point any fingers, but I think that's okay. I think let's have a serious discussion. Let's treat you like a complex person, like somebody who believes hard things, who's figuring out hard things and who's discovering that you can believe opposite things that contradict. So I believe that and I want to talk about that.

BB: In the book Seth is in love with his best friend at school, they're having a relationship. For you growing up gay in small town America, were those role models if you like around in books you were reading?

PN: Gosh, that suddenly got very Opera, didn't it? [laughter] Do you know who Opera is? Or are people too young for Opera? God, I would feel so old if that were true, thank you for knowing who Opera is. They're absolutely one of the things that I could read, absolutely not, which was a function of the time; I can't regret it or condemn it, just that's how it was. But god, YA now is so rich and so big and so full of every book you'd want, all genres, all kinds of tones, escapist and serious and realist and fantastical and dealing with I'd say issues, because issues sounds again like a lesson or like sermon and who wants that? But they're dealing with all the things that you all think about. And that's one of the motivations for writing because I wanted to write the books that I didn't get a chance to read when I was a teenager, and this would be one. I always wanted to write a book about waking up and the world was empty, because I think that would be kind of paradise, and I'm sorry that that would involve all of you being dead. But I'd get over that. And to be able to talk about Seth and Goodman like it's not a big deal, because it's not a big deal. And you all know that it's not a big deal, so why do we all have to pretend that it's a big deal, and it's not the focus of the plot, it's just something that happens in his life that's true to him.

And one of the big philosophies of life that I have is that one of the ways to change the world is to act as if the world is already changed. So this is the world that I'd like, so I'm going to act like the world is already that way, and maybe you can drag a few people along with you.

BB: Let's talk about the world that's in this novel. Stephanie who's from Holy Rood down the front here.

PN: Hi Stephanie.

BB: One of the team in the bright purple ties here, you've got a question.

Girl: My question is, is there anything that you think we are doing in our society today that's going to make our world a destocking place, like your book?

PN: Oh gosh, oh, that's a heavy question, Stephanie. That's a lot of pressure on me! I think that...well, my theory about dystopia, particularly why it's so popular in YA, if you think about what a dystopia is, a dystopia is a society that's broken down, divided into factions usually, full of rules that you will be severely punished for breaking but no one will properly explain them to you, filled with friends who are faithful and loyal but also duplicitous and will betray you. Dystopia is basically secondary school. It's basically what you're living right now. And I think that's why it's so popular and I think that's why there's so many popular YA books. It also includes anxiety about the world. It also includes that national anxiety; what will the future hold and I can't control the future and I can't predict the future, so it's natural to be afraid of it. I think it's always been that way, I think it will always continue to be that way.

But I call myself a desperate optimist, I'm not naturally optimistic but I feel like I have to be or what's the point. And so I think one, we always have got through difficult stuff. We've gotten through changes in communication before, we've gotten through horrible wars before, we've gotten through things. And you've got to think that we're capable of that and that we're still want that, and I think we are... And I also think that we're all aware, we're much more aware that the world could be this or much more aware that the world could go dystopic. And so there'll be a lot of people who are asking the question well, what can we do to stop it, like yourself. And that's a good place to begin. So I think there's lots of reason for hope, I really do. I'm not just saying that, I'm not just being rar-rar American, hold on tight to your dreams! That's going to look funny on camera!

But I think there's reason for hope and I think it's because you feel free and feel worried enough and concerned enough to ask that question. So I think it's a good place to start.

BB: Do you think teenagers are more anxious and concerned than adults?

PN: Yes, kind of. I mean I hate to make that kind of division. But I think so and I think because we can all see the world now. You can go online and see the entire world in five minutes, even though on Twitter everybody will tell you all about the world. And that's cause for concern. But I think teenagers have always been anxious. I was an anxious teenager. Because there's always that terrible thing of

you have all these responsibilities of being an adult but almost none of the privileges, and that's just not fair! That's unjust, I felt it was unjust. That when it was convenient I would be treated like an adult and when it was convenient I would be treated like a child and to not have your decisions, to have them taken away from you, to be made by somebody else who sometimes makes them really wrong, that's hard, and that's anxious making. It has to be got through, we've all got to do it but I think so.

BB: In something like a monster calls we really get the chance to find out about what's going on in the emotions of this 13 year old boy. How do you, a grown man, put yourself in the head of a 13 year old? And I think your readership would agree, accurately describe what their feelings are.

PN: Well, I don't understand why so many adults forget what it's like to be a teenager. I don't know why, they just block it out of their heads. Because yeah, I mean it's hard and yeah, there are terrible times and yeah, it's hard. But there's also fun times, there's also good stuff. So I try to remember what it was like, but mainly I'm writing...when I write a book I can't write it for anybody else. I've got to write it for me because I have to love it and if I don't love it there's not a chance anybody else will love it.

So when I write an adult book I write it from the adult me, for me now but when I write a teenage book I write it for the teenage me, and I just try to remember what it was like. And it's all there, I don't think you stop... You are every age you've ever been up to now. I believe that. You are still one, two, three, four, five, six...you are every age and it's all there. So you can choose to find it again. And it's basically just about trying to...again, taking the fact that you have a serious emotion, that you have serious feelings and serious thoughts. And that's not that much of an imaginative leap, that's just imaging that another human being is a human being. So I just try to put that imagining on a teenage character.

BB: There's not a huge difference between your young adult novels and other writers' adult novels. Do sometimes novelist look down on you because you're writing young adult fiction?

PN: It's funny because I know that there are a few...I know a few YA writers who are slightly embarrassed, a little apologetic. And nobody ever says that to me because I'm not even remotely apologetic about it and I will [due\[25:38\]](#) down if you try to make me feel bad or try to tell me that what I've written is somehow not as good as something else. That YA literature is somehow not literature. I don't believe that at all. I mean there is a recent total, total Click Bay article; you can't believe anybody took it seriously about why adults should be embarrassed to

read YA. This was a couple of days ago. And you think well, one I don't believe that that article is true, I think it's just somebody trying to get site hits. But it's also so easy to disprove. I could list 15 books in a minute that would disprove everything that had been argued about how it's not challenging, it's not ambiguous, that it's not trying to shake up the way you see the world. So I'm not even remotely embarrassed and I don't let anybody tell me to be so.

BB: Patrick Ness is our special guest in this Authors Live event. Let's get another one of your questions now. Hazel from McLaren who's over in the back row there...

PN: I'm having a hard time seeing the back.

BB: ...has a question for Patrick.

PN: Hello at the back.

BB: Let's find out what it is.

Girl: How did you get the inspiration for More Than This?

PN: I always, always, always wanted to write that book where you woke up and the world was empty. And for years I wanted to write about this. Do you write? What kind of stuff do you write?

Girl: I'm writing a fantasy novel.

PN: Oh, you're writing a whole novel? Fantastic. That's great. You're not too young to do that by the way, you are absolutely not too young to do that. I always wanted to write it. Well, the thing about a good idea and I think that's a good idea, it's an old fashioned idea, lots of books have been written about waking up and the world is empty, being the only person on the planet. So I think the best thing to do with an idea that you think is a good idea is to wait, because if it's a good idea other things will start sticking to it and you need way more than one idea to write a novel, way more than one. So it's best to just wait and let it grow and let one become two and two become five and five become ten.

And so I had this idea for a long time and I always wanted to write this book and then it just started to gather things to it, like what a great metaphor for what it feels like to be lonely as a teenager, to be literally alone. I thought that's a nice combination. The idea that there have been so many dystopias now that you can take the idea of a dystopia and do something else with it. You can ask a different question. You can say this is the expected dystopia that you all will believe in and that you've all seen before. But then ask another question about how real is it

and what is it doing, what function is it serving and does it matter. And so those things started to come together.

And then Seth's situation, I don't want to give too many spoilers away but I thought this feels important, this feels real and painful and like something people could relate to because I relate to it. So it's a lot of different things coming together, but it has its germ and it's an idea I've had since I was very young, younger than you. I always wanted to write this book and now I finally get the chance because the ideas came together. So it can be a fast process too, it doesn't have to be your whole life. But this one, it became ready and that's where it came from.

BB: There's a line in the book that's towards the end that talks about surprising people with unexpected, unimaginable stories of their own. That kind of describes your writing and unimaginable things, lots of us can't imagine the stories that are in there. You run marathons, you can start off being a not very good marathon runner, you can work hard, you can train and become a great marathon runner. Can you do that with your imagination?

PN: Probably. I think so. I mean I think so. That's different than writing. I thought you were going to ask if you could do that with writing. And you can a bit with writing. But I can train to sing for years and I'd still be a really crappy singer and really you don't want to hear me sing. But I think you can and I think it's just space and time and time to breathe. And I do run, I'm a distance runner and that's an hour where I can do nothing but run and think. And I think that's vital to a writer or to any creativity or to any imagination, just time to breathe. That's valuable. It's not you being lazy, it's valuable.

BB: And I guess for you guys it's really hard to find time just to be you and just not to have those other pressures of exams and family life and relationships and everything else going on. But there's a lot to be said for just sitting down and clearing your mind, see what comes into it.

PN: And you've stopped listening to us on this subject, haven't you, because you think this is just yet another adult telling me that I'm young and I'm wasting my life, not imagining and we should be carefree and I should just sit under a tree and think about an apple. And if I were you I would be thinking that's a lot of crap as well. But you can find it other ways. Reading a book, I know you're all big readers because you're here, reading a book is a way to do it. Reading a book is time for yourself with nobody else, with no interruptions, that's churning your imagination. Writing a story is the same. Working on an art project is the same. So it's not this...I'm trying so hard not to swear.

It's not this fake idea that you have got to find time to be carefree teenagers because I don't think there is such a thing. But there are other ways to do it and other ways to find you and your brain working something out.

BB: And I suppose it's like you mentioned earlier on, the brilliant thing for you is with your imagination, you've not got anyone saying that's too crazy an idea.

PN: Yeah, and that's the terrifying thing and the great thing. Yes, the tyranny of choice. So if you can write anything, well, that's very intimidating because what do you choose? And you learn, it's practice. You don't always get it right.

BB: Let's get another question. Finn who's also from McLaren, somewhere there in the middle, has got a question for you, Patrick.

PN: I can see Finn's face.

Girl: I loved your book so much, but why did you make the ending so indecisive?

PN: Well, now, indecisive is a rude word! [laughs] Is your name really Finn?

Girl: Yeah.

PN: Like really Finn? Were you born Finn? Your parents called you Finn? Or is it a nickname?

Girl: No, it's shortened but I'm not going to say it because it's horrible! [laughter]

PN: Is that why you ask such rude questions? No, I'm teasing, it's absolutely fine! I wouldn't call it indecisive. I would absolutely not call it indecisive. I very, very much decided on that ending and I knew that that sentence would be the last sentence of the book before I started writing it. And I truly believe that all of More Than This is in that last sentence, everything that the book is about is that last sentence. It's only five words and it's everything I wanted to say.

But we could call it ambiguous. We could call it tantalising, and no, there won't be a sequel. But he gets to exactly where he needs to get and that's what I think it's about. I think it's a book about living with uncertainty; how do you live without knowing? That's so hard! It's so hard! But you have to do it. You have to find a way to do it. So it's really just trying to get him to see his world as bigger than he thinks it is, because it is. Not in a lesson kind of way, not in a you all need to do this, but just trying to find the truth of what his story is. And that last line is everything he needs to learn I think, it's everywhere he needs to go. So let's call it ambiguous, Finn. [chuckling]

BB: It certainly gives us lots to think about and talks about those big, big questions. And I suppose the biggest one is that life after death, is that something you believe in?

PN: Not really, but I wouldn't want to tread on anybody else's belief. But I don't actually think it's about life after death. It could be, it could be depending on how you interpret it and I'm okay if you interpret it however you want to. But I think it's more about what do you decide is real and what do you decide is important? And like one of the characters, her motto is know yourself and go on swinging. And that's one way to approach life and I think it's just Seth trying to figure out... We're all trying to figure out the world. We're all trying to figure out what's going on. And again, that sounded totally adult crappy nonsense. We're all in it together boys and girls! [laughter] And that, I don't believe in it that way either. It's more life is hard, life is inexplicable, life makes no sense, it really doesn't and we're looking for ways to make it make sense, and one of those ways what we make it make sense is through telling a story about it. And so it's just finding the right story that will work and finding another story that will follow on from that.

So I think it's more than that, it's more about is the way I see the world serving me best? Is the way I see the world saving me? Is the way I see the world causing me happiness or is it causing me pain? Can I see it another way? Is that possible? And is that really possible not just because somebody told me it's possible but because I have found out for myself that I can look at the world in my own personal way, that allows me to flourish and be happy and to risk a friend, to risk loving somebody. So I think it's about that. I don't think it's about necessarily heaven or hell.

BB: Seth has lived like you in the US and the UK. I mentioned earlier you're now a British citizen. What do you miss about America, about home?

PN: Oh, junk food. Boy, I mean I seriously miss American junk food. I even tweeted yesterday how hard is it United Kingdom to have widely available decent chocolate milkshakes? I mean seriously! Seriously! And I've got a real theory about junk food. I think junk food is not about the food, I think it's about who you are and what age you were when you first had it. Because I grew up drinking grape soda, cannot find it in this country at all! But I grew up drinking grape soda like grape Fanta, and didn't have it for years and then I went to Tokyo, and there was grape Fanta all over Tokyo. Restaurants served grape Fanta, and I thought I haven't had this since I was a kid! So I thought oh, I'll get some.

And on its own there's nothing about grape soda that's particularly wonderful, it tastes like grape flavoured petrol, I mean it's really...it's not the best thing in the

world. But I'd drink it and I'm seven years old again and the summer's going to last forever and everything is fantastic because I've got my grape soda. And so I miss that, I miss the terrible, terrible junk food that I absolutely shouldn't eat the most. That sounds like a terrible thing to say, but that is actually what I miss. I buy imported breakfast cereal because I miss...

BB: Do you really?

PN: Yeah. I miss Apple Jacks and Captain Crunch.

BB: I wish we'd known because we've got some great junk food here in Scotland that we could've laid on for you.

PN: Well, I know, and I do get that quite a lot from the Scottish about their champion junk food and deep fried things that you are...

BB: We're like the deep south of America here.

PN: That's okay!

BB: Before we let you go we need to find out what's happening next; what are the plans?

PN: Today is a Thursday and I expect to be done with the first draft of my next book by Saturday. So just by coincidence it's another teen book, it should be out next year. I'm not going to tell you anything about it, just that it's another teen book.

BB: Sorry to interrupt but you seem remarkably relaxed for a man whose first draft is due by Saturday.

PN: It's not due. They'll take it when they get it! [laughter] Two Carnegie Medals! [laughter] It's fine. I'm looking forward to finishing and I'm looking forward to starting the second draft and turning it into a book. So it's not really stressful because the stress is in the middle, the stress is all that hard part where you're trying to figure out the bulk of the book. But by this point everything's in place and I just need to get it down and that's a good feeling. And like I said, I've written the screenplay for A Monster Calls and it should start shooting probably September, it's got Liam Neeson in it.

BB: Which is quite good.

PN: Quite happy about that. And hopefully A Knife of Never Letting Go movie I'll have some news on hopefully soon. I can't say anything more than that.

BB: And will you want control in the film?

- PN: It doesn't matter I want! It doesn't...they're not going to give me the thing. I wrote the screenplay for A Monster Calls because I wanted to have to a part in the conversation, I wanted to...I thought I knew...I was worried that it could be sentimentalised and made too easy and I didn't want that. I thought it was untruthful so I wanted to at least start the conversation. For A Knife of Never Letting Go they've hired some fantastic people who are going to have way better ideas than I could about how to do noise on screen for example. So I'm just really excited. You hope for the best, you always hope for the best but the book always remains. And the book is mine and the book will always be mine. So hope for the best, but I've always got the book.
- BB: Brilliant, Patrick. Thank you. Before we all go let me just remind you that as well as watching previous Authors Live events at any time you can download the free learning resources that go with each of our talks, scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive is the web address. A date for the diary, Thursday 2nd October at 11am, we've got another event for S1 to S4 pupils taking place then with the children's laureate Malorie Blackman. So if you plan to be watching it do make sure that you let us know that you're onboard. Authors Live is a joint production between Scottish Book Trust, BBC Scotland Learning and is supported by Creative Scotland. Before we go please join me wherever you are and here in our studio in the BBC and give a huge big round of applause to your special guest today, Patrick Ness. [applause]
- PN: Thank you very much. Thank you for your questions. Thank you.