

Date: (In purple)

Author/Interview subject: Anthony Horowitz

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth

Other speakers:

JF: Hello there, I am Janice Forsyth. A huge warm welcome to Authors Live. This is the world-class series of authors events that are beamed live into all sorts of venues all over the UK. We're talking about schools, homes, libraries, wherever you are, we're so delighted that you are joining us. And this is a particularly special day because we are about to welcome a fabulous author. But before I introduce him we also have some wonderful children from three South Lanarkshire primary schools. From Quarter Primary School, Leadhills and High Mill Primary School. They might even give you a wave, I don't know. But they're very nice anyway. Aren't they gorgeous? Yeah, they're waving too. Yeah, they're not too cool for school, and neither are you. It's so lovely to have you along.

So as I said, every time we have an Authors Live it's special, but this is particularly special because we're welcoming such a big name from the world of children's books. And it's a big year for him too because he's celebrating the 15th anniversary of the massively popular, I love them, Alex Rider, super spy books. Some of you will have read them I know and some of you also will have seen the film adaption of the very first one, Stormbreaker which I also loved. It's time I grew up! No it's not.

Anyway, he also writes for adults and has been responsible for some of the most popular and best loved drama series on television, Foyle's War and Midsomer Murders. And as well as all of that the Queen only awarded him an OBE for services to literature last year. But this has got to be a high point for him. Boys and girls, here and out there, give a massive cheering welcome to Anthony Horowitz.

AH: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Janice. Thank you.

JF: It's lovely to see you and you look very healthy. But we should say you woke up this morning and you didn't have much of a voice, did you?

AH: I apologise if I sound a bit croaky in this interview, it is just flu, a little bit of flu.

JF: But you're going to do well and we've got water and everything else to look after you. So Alex Rider; we've got to talk about Alex Rider first of all. I'm not joking; I've spoken to Anthony before but this is the first time we've actually met, which is lovely, because we've talked to each other on radio in different studios. And by now you know that I am a massive fan of the Alex Rider books.

AH: You're being very kind.

JF: I am lucky enough to have a boy who grew up reading them, so I read them with him. So what was the inspiration for this extraordinary boy?

AH: Well, it all began with the James Bonds films, which I used to see when I was at school growing up. It was a very big event for me to go and see all the Sean Connery, Roger Moore, all the Bond films. Every year it was a big event in my year, couldn't book to go to the cinema because there was no computerised booking. You had to go and stand in the rain for three or four hours to actually be the first person in to see these wonderful films.

But the thing is Janice; I thought that James Bond got a little bit too old. When Roger Moore played him, you may not know this, when Roger Moore played James Bond for the last time he was 57 years old. That's old! That's old enough to be James Bond's...

JF: It's ancient!

AH: ...grandfather! Really! So I thought wouldn't it be great if he was a teenager again! Why can't I make him young? And that was my light bulb moment; I would write a story about a boy who was 14, who went to an ordinary school who had an ordinary life but who got sucked in to the world of intelligence and became James Bond.

JF: Fantastic, a great idea. Did you think at the time actually this could be a series?

AH: Well, when you're writing you always look for the next idea. You get excited about having ideas. For me the most fun about being a writer is having the ideas, and I have lots and lots of them. And so you sit down and you choose which one you want to write, because you know that an idea is going to be a whole year of your life writing it, maybe even two years by the time it's been published. It's a long, long time from the thought in my head up here to the book on the table there. That's maybe two years.

So you've got to really want to do it, and so that's where I start. And...what was the question again?

JF: It was the series, the idea of did you know initially you might...

AH: No, I didn't know initially that it was going to be a long, huge series. I thought let's see what happens, I'll write one and see if people like it. But they did like it and they bought lots of copies of it. And so I thought well okay, I'll do another one. And then they bought twice as many copies of Point Blank and then Skeleton Key happened and Eagle Strike. And the audience got bigger and bigger and bigger, and suddenly I realised it was a phenomenon.

JF: Yeah, absolutely. So how interesting though for a kid. So your age or a bit older and going into this grown up world, a world that most of us, whether we're grown up or not don't know much about. Yes, we see Bond films, but did you feel that you had to do research? How possible was it to do research into a world that's hidden away from us?

AH: Well, I think it is important to do research, because the whole thing about writing is, and this is something that you should all know when you're writing at school, is that the more you know about what you're writing and about the world you're writing, so if you're writing about your own family and your own life and things that have happened to you and your life, it's much easier because you're closer to it. And also if you're writing a book like an Alex Rider which is sort of fantastical with Alex jumping out of a helicopter, smashing through the roof of a museum, shooting the Prime Minister which is what happens at the end of Stormbreaker, it helps to sell that story, to make it believable if you know the make of the helicopter. If like me you've climbed onto the roof of the science museum and seen exactly what the layout is, if you can describe things with an authority and then accuracy, then you can sell the crazy ideas. So research was important for me.

JF: And it sounds like it's fun. You got to climb onto the roof of the science museum?

AH: I did and I also for Point Blank...Point Blank has a crane that picks up a boat and dumps it onto a police station which is the opening of that book. So I climbed a crane, which was very exciting, to go right in the centre of London, incredibly high up, I mean it was really high and scary and it was blowing about in the wind like this. But I did it, again to give myself a feel of what it was like to be a crane driver.

JF: This is an added bonus, isn't it, to writing books. Had you realised this? You can actually have fun and adventures as well as your characters?

AH: Also for Stormbreaker I climbed into a car crusher, because in the Stormbreaker there's a sequence where Alex gets trapped in a car crusher. And so I climbed into a car crusher to see what that was like, and I learnt something, because the guy started it up for me and I learnt that if you're in a car crusher and it's all moving in and crushing you, and you shout please stop, I'm scared, he can't hear you over the noise of the engine. Something I learnt.

JF: There you go, a very useful tip to take away from today's session boys and girls. Useful, isn't it?

Gadgets then, that's part of the fun. We talked about James Bond, we love the gadgets in Bond and of course Alex Rider has some marvellous gadgets to play around with too. Just out of your head then? Just from thin air or did you research for those?

AH: Well, the gadgets came from lots of places. First of all I used to go into my son's bedroom...well, I had two. You said you had a son.

JF: Yeah.

AH: I had two sons when I was writing these books, they started like seven and nine. And I'd go into their room and I'd look around and see what sort of things they had, and I would turn those into gadgets. So for example, they had a Rubik's Cube one year, a yo-yo and my son had acne at one stage, so he had acne cream. And all these things turn up in the Alex Rider books.

And I had two rules; they weren't allowed to be lethal, because the publishers got very upset if things were too violent. And they had to be realistic. So I think, I don't know about you, but if you've seen those James Bond films where for example they have an invisible car, you know that doesn't exist, you know there's no such thing as the invisible car, so it spoils the reality of the film. So those are the rules; non-lethal and real.

And my favourite gadget in all the gadgets, I often get asked this, was the mosquito cream that Alex has in Ark Angel. And it doesn't repel insects, it attracts them. So he smears it on somebody and they get chased away by 20,000 hornets and mosquitos and wasps and flying nasty things, and I love that. There's so many people that I'd like to give a little smear of that to.

JF: I bet, that is torture actually. Imagine that! In Scotland it would be midge cream, wouldn't it?

AH: Well, midges, I mean I've been up Arthur's Seat and there are a lot of midges up there.

JF: Yeah, they are lethal. So gosh, already you've talked about the mosquito, not repellent, the opposite of that, the attractant. You've talked about being in a car crusher, you've talked about being on the roof of the science museum and so on. So, so much when it comes action scenes and there being obviously so many brilliant action scenes in all of the books. What's the secret to that? Is that something that you had to learn about how you build it up through words, build up the excitement?

AH: Well, first of all, I mean there are two things now in that question. The first is that I believe that all young people have a very visual way of life. When I was a boy growing up we only had one television in the house, it was only black and white. And there were only two stations on it. Now, everybody is bombarded with images on their computer screens, there are 30 channels on every television, there are 10 televisions in every house. People on their phones have images, images, images. So when I write a book I try to get young people, my readers, to see what I'm writing. I always think in terms of images and pictures.

And when I'm creating an action sequence that's what I've got to do; I've got to sell what I see around me. So what I do is I go normally to the city or to the place where the excitement is going to happen and I actually walk around and I look at it. I mean looking at this building we're in now which is huge and has got all these different layers and all these rooms and concrete pillars. I think to myself wow, what a great sequence! I can have a real shootout here at the BBC in Glasgow because it's such a fantastic building! And that's how I do it. I look around me.

And when I did the bike chase in Eagle Strike which takes place in Amsterdam, I walked through Amsterdam and I looked at all the... Oh, there's a bridge that does that; one of these opening and shutting bridges. So I thought I can have Alex jump from one side to the other, and that sort of thing. You look around and you use what's there.

JF: Amazing. And do you know it's so funny. I've been in this building so often and I've not thought about it in terms of how it could be a location for some kind of extraordinary action scene. I'm imagining it now.

AH: But it is, isn't it?

JF: Yeah!

AH: It is like a James Bond lair actually.

JF: Yes.

AH: I mean you can imagine somewhere up there is Blofeld with his white cat, and it's a big evil sort of building, and I like that.

JF: Yeah, I'm loving this too. We'll make sure that the children are safe though if any big action sequences happen over the next half an hour. It must be so interesting having created Alex Rider. So he comes out of your imagination and for all of these readers across the world, for us, he exists really strongly, we feel as if we know him. That's the secret, isn't it, of a really good, well-written character. You can imagine him. But you must feel that more than any of us.

AH: That's absolutely true. I mean I started writing Alex in the year 2000, it's a long time ago now. That's why we've had to put on new jackets for the books and redesign them and everything to bring them back up-to-date again. Because I was nervous that there might be things in the books that were old fashioned. But I've known this boy for a very, very long time. I've written ten books, I took him from the age of 14 all the way to the age of 15. I always said I'd stop when he got to 15, I didn't want to write too many of these books. But he had a very busy year; he saved the world ten times. So it was quite a tough time for him.

And the more I've written about him, and this is quite fun when you're a writer, the more I've got to know the character. And if you read all ten books they get a little deeper, a little darker, a little bit like Harry Potter. When J K Rowling wrote the Harry books, as the books went on and you got to know Harry more and more, a darkness crept in as well. And I had to fight in the Alex Rider books not to make them too dark and depressing at the end because so many bad things had happened to him. But there was a tendency for him to be a little bit sort to...just a bit upset by life really.

JF: Do you miss him?

AH: I do miss writing him, yeah, I do.

JF: Aw.

AH: I have to be honest. It was a fantastic time and it's wonderful that a whole new generation of readers are discovering Alex again. But I do miss writing about him, but at the same time I think it was the right decision to make. I was always scared of writing that book, that a young person would run out and buy, take home and read, and then they'd say you know, it wasn't as good as the last one, it's not so good anymore. And I didn't want to write that book. So I limited how many I wrote, and I think it was the right decision.

JF: It's amazing how time flies because you're saying you started writing them in 2000, which is before you were born, isn't it?

AH: Is that true?

JF: Yeah.

AH: Were you born after 2000?

JF: Yeah.

AH: Yeah, it's terrible!

JF: I know, time flies!

AH: Gaw, that makes me feel old. I am old!

JF: I know.

AH: Not good.

JF: It's quite...

AH: But it is interesting that when we re-wrote the books to bring them up-to-date there wasn't much to do. I was quite careful when I wrote them not to make them too classic the year 2000. This is a boy who lives in a modern period and that modern period is now.

JF: And you talked about the redesign and they're really funky, they look great. So do you have any say in that? You, the author in the design of the books.

AH: The publisher listens to everything I saw, and then they ignore me! I mean the truth is I write the books and my publishers work very closely with me in the look and everything. But they're professionals, they know what they're doing and I really listen to them and go along. These covers were tested on a lot of young people as such and were shown to people and there were lots of focus groups and everything. They weren't just rattled off on a wet Thursday. So I think they've done a very good job.

JF: It's so important, isn't it? Because you go into a book shop or your library and there are so many books and if you don't know the book already actually the cover's quite important, isn't it?

AH: Well, the first thing, somebody once said you can't judge a book by its cover. But that's nonsense because actually that's the first thing you judge a book by, is the cover. When you look at the author's name, if you know the author and you think

well, his last book was good. So that might get you to buy it. And then you might look at the stuff on the back, we call it the blurb, which is that little story thing on the back. And then the most important thing of all, the first paragraph. Because if the first paragraph doesn't hook you, why would you read the second paragraph?

And for me, when I write a book, I almost imagine a pair of hands coming out of the book, grabbing the reader by the throat and saying don't go! Don't go and play a computer game. Don't go and watch television. Don't go and say hello to your parents. Don't eat, don't do sport, stay and read. And that I think is how I write.

JF: What a fantastic image, and actually that is a great tip that you have had there for free from our top author. If you are interested in writing which I'm sure you are, wherever you are, grab them by the neck with that first sentence...

AH: Grab them, that's right.

JF: ...that first paragraph. A brilliant top tip. Now, thinking about a different kind of writing, and I'm sure you want to know about this too. So we've talked a wee bit about writing Alex Rider, these novels, part of a series. But then as we say you're very successful in other realms. Thinking about the link with Alex Rider, Stormbreaker, the film, which I really, really enjoyed, a great action film. You wrote that, how different a process is that, writing for the screen?

AH: Well, it's very difficult to explain in a few words, the difference between writing books and writing films and television. The main difference is that when I write a book I control the entire world. What I say goes. I don't have to worry about what I'm doing either. I can have buildings exploding, I can have car chases in the middle of Glasgow or wherever I happen to be. I can have 500 people... I can't do that on television and film, because that costs money, it's expensive. Television and film is collaboration, and working with 60, 70, 80 different people to make a film of something. Or actually with Stormbreaker, probably about 150 people worked on that film, and they're all making decisions and doing things which may not be what I want but it's part of the filmmaking process.

I think I love writing film and television and I love writing books, but I always say and I still believe that my most valuable work is my books. Because your relationship with a book is very different from your relationship with film or TV. Film or television is a screen; it's a piece of glass, it's hard, you can't get inside it. A book, you open it up like a door and it's your energy and it's you're thinking and your creativity that makes a book come to life. All I do is write the words, it is you, young people and the people watching this who actually by reading create a

fantastic film. You people, you put all the buildings in, you put the landscapes in, you see what Alex Rider looks like.

People think of reading, or sometimes talk about reading as being something as a leisure pursuit, something you do just to relax. But actually I believe that reading is probably the most creative thing anybody can do. It's equal to writing, because you are creating a whole world. And that is why young people who read have an alacrity, have a cheerfulness and energy that you don't see sometimes in children who don't read books.

JF: How interesting, because you're absolutely right, it's easy to think that you're sitting reading and it's a passive thing. But actually it's active.

AH: It's not...

JF: It's all going on.

AH: ...you're taking the little black and white dots on a page which are letters, you're putting them together to make words, the words make sentences, the sentences make worlds. So that's why reading, and that's why things like this Authors Live programme are so important because at the end of the day I have come to realise that reading, besides being a pleasure and besides being one of the few things in life that's free, because we can go to libraries, we can get books from anywhere, has this fantastic... It releases this amazing energy.

JF: That's amazing, that's wonderful. Now, thinking about the actual act of writing, because again, there might be people here or watching, wherever you are, who are quite interested in the idea of how you write for television or for film, because clearly you're not writing the description of places that you're doing in the books. It's all dialogue.

AH: That's right.

JF: But do you also have to write in...do you get a say in how things look? Do you put a basic outline of the setting?

AH: What I do is, a film script will have one, the number of the scene, int, which means interior rather than being shot outside. And it might say interior BBC. If I was doing this scene now, 1IntBBCDay, because that tells everybody what they need to know. An author is sitting on a sofa talking to a well-known radio presenter and journalist. There are a group of young people watching and then after that I just do the dialogue of what you and I are saying to each other. And that's it. And somebody else comes in and dresses these children and says that

some of them will wear red jerseys and some of them will wear mauve jerseys and somebody will dress you. An actress of course will play you...

JF: A very beautiful actress of course.

AH: Of course, it will have to be Meryl Streep I think for you,

JF: Of course it would. A bit old...

AH: ...something like that maybe.

JF: Never mind.

AH: Yeah, a bit old, you're right. But the greatest actress in the world.

JF: Of course.

AH: Somebody else, a set designer will come in and decide that they're going to have these green and black sofas and these weird wooden boxes on there as well. And then there'll be of course camera people and a director. So it becomes a huge undertaking.

JF: Yeah, George Clooney is acting...

AH: To play you or more?

JF: Here's Anthony Horowitz. [laughs]

AH: Oh, I wouldn't say no to George Clooney. Thank you.

JF: And in terms of actually writing the dialogue it might be easy to think well, actually, that is much simpler and perhaps easy to do than writing a novel. But is it deceptively simple?

AH: I think in all writing...I never use easy, difficult, in any of my writing, because I love writing. I mean I think the first thing to say to anybody who wanted to write, whether it's film, television, books, whatever, poetry, short stories, I think you've got to love doing it. You've got to have that energy and that passion to make it work. Because I always say that writing is a little like telepathy. If you're bored and you're miserable, this is to do with school work, if you get given essays to write at school and you are bored and miserable when you write it, your teachers will be bored and miserable when they read it. That's how it works.

So whether it's television or film or books, I always treat it the same way. Now, as to writing dialogue, whether it's in a novel or a television script, I think the secret is to listen for it, to hear it. All good dialogue has a pattern, it has a rhythm. Some

people talk very quickly, I do. Some people talk more slowly, some people stutter, some people repeat themselves. And it's just listening out and trying to capture how people address themselves. So if you've got a character who is, shall we say, I don't know, a professor, he's 60 or 70 years old and he's a bit of a boffin, he might talk...well, he might not find his way immediately. So do you see what I'm saying?

JF: Yeah.

AH: I've become that. So actually in a way as well writing is acting. When I'm writing I act my characters as well and I know exactly how they're going to behave and how they're going to talk, and that's what I'm doing, is recording it all, which is how I do my books.

JF: That's amazing. That's really, really interesting. So as well as being a bit of an actor, when it comes to actually working on the screenplay or indeed the filming itself, with Stormbreaker did you have any dealings with for example the director or anybody?

AH: Yeah, when I'm working on film and television I normally go to the set, and I...there's not a lot for me to do because my work is done by the time they start shooting. But I'll often go to the set, I like to appear, I have appeared in Foyle's war two or three times. I like to do that every time. I have a new series called New Blood which is going to be shot this year for the BBC. And I'll certainly do a little part in there; I might be a dead body or something, I don't know. I have a bit of fun.

JF: Look out for him.

AH: And I like to talk to the actors, I always meet the actors and I try to meet the people working on it, and just be part of it. Because the thing about writing, Janice, is that it's quite a lonely business. I spend...ten hours I spend every day on my own in a room in London. That's a long time if you think about it, much longer than any of you even spend at school and you've got each other. I'm by myself in a room working, working, working. I love doing it, but the opportunity to get onto the set and to look around me. When I shot Stormbreaker there was a sequence at the beginning of Stormbreaker where Ewan McGregor is being chased in a car very, very fast and by a helicopter.

So we had a helicopter flying above a car, and then Damien Lewis who played Yassin the assassin dangled...actually it wasn't him, it was a stuntman, dangled upside down from the helicopter in order to shoot Ewan McGregor upside down. So we had a helicopter, we had a car doing 80 miles an hour, we had a second

helicopter pursuing the first helicopter, and we had all these people there and fire engines in case anything went wrong. And I stood there and I thought you know, all of this came out of there.

JF: It's amazing.

AH: And that was to me the most amazing thought. All this madness and it came out of my head.

JF: See the power that you all have too potentially to do that is just extraordinary, and it's free; it's just thinking.

AH: Well, writing and reading are both free.

JF: Yeah, it's amazing.

AH: I have the only career where I need nothing. I need a pen, which costs £1, and I need a pad of paper which costs another... If you want to be a teacher you've got to have a school, you've got to have children. If you want to be a radio presenter you need a radio studio and the BBC or whatever. A cameraman needs a camera, whatever. I just have my head and a pen and paper. Of course I do things with computers as well, but that's the joy of it, it's the freedom of just... I never have to dress up, I can work when I want to work, I can work anywhere in the world, and that's the joy of being a writer.

JF: I'm so glad that you mentioned that particular scene from Stormbreaker because when I think of Stormbreaker that's the one I always think of because it's really edge of the seat exciting. And do you have a set...you talked about writing in a room; do you have a particular room that you write in? Do you have a particular routine? Some writers like to get up in the morning and write all day, and others just do it when they feel like it?

AH: I don't actually have a routine, I just wake up and I start work. But I do have a room, I live in London and my office looks out over...the whole top floor of my house is an office, and I look out over St Paul's Cathedral and the Old Bailey. So it's quite an interesting view. I love Charles Dickens, and all Charles Dickens' characters lived around the area where I am now. And everything in the room is designed to make me work harder. So I have lots of Alex Rider gadgets and things knocking about me. I have magic tricks, because I love magic. And I think that writing is also often about deception and tricking people; how does Alex Rider escape from this? Or who murdered somebody in a book? These are like magic tricks.

And I also have a human skull, a real human skull that sits beside my computer, and this is something that you young people won't understand at all, but it's to remind me that time is short. That I haven't got...I'm 60 now, I was 60 quite recently, it's a terrible thought. And it reminds me that actually the years are running out. Keep working, keep writing more, be more energetic because quite soon Anthony you're going to look like this skull too! Quite literally, because I'm going to have myself made into one and then I can be book ends.

JF: You're not, are you?

AH: No, I'm joking.

JF: I mean we can just tell from the way Anthony's talking, and this is a man with a sore throat today, that he has piles of energy. But I wonder, how do you organise everything? Because you've got the ideas for the novels and then you've got the television dramas, you're talking about another new one coming out. Are you terribly organised? Do you have a big whiteboard where you mark everything up with what you're doing?

AH: No, it's not like that, I'm not organised. I mean there's two answers to that. The first thing is that I will never do two things in one day. So I'll do a novel on Monday and then maybe do television on Tuesday or possibly I'll do television for the whole week. So therefore I'm not organised in that sense. I'm immersed, when I write something, if I'm writing an Alex Rider novel I'm absolutely inside the novel, nothing else matters. Nothing else in the world comes close. All that matters is Alex, the danger he's in, how he's going to escape, what the bad guys are doing, what the world looks like. I live inside the book.

But where I am organised is I never write anything...and again, this is some advice I might give you for your own school writing. I always structure everything I write. I find that just a minute...if you're given something to do at school, a history story or creative writing, I always think that one minute spent thinking about it, doodling, drawing, making a structure, will save you thirty minutes writing. And I can't write a book unless I've got my plan for the book beside me on the desk.

JF: Wow, so you know how it's going to end?

AH: I can't write the book if I don't know how the ending is.

JF: How it's going to end, yeah. Because it's interesting, because lots of writers don't work that way and they say they let the characters take them off on a journey through the story.

AH: Well, as you know from doing this programme for so long, every author is different.

JF: Yeah.

AH: There are no rules in writing. So anything I've said today incidentally, if you're a writer, you can dismiss! You can start work at nine in the morning and work till twelve every morning. You can decide to do 2,000 words a day and not one word more. You can write how you want to write, because writing is freedom. It is a freedom to express yourself, to be yourself, to write what you want to write. And the only important thing is if you believe in yourself, if you have total self-belief you will almost certainly succeed.

JF: I just know that immediately after this edition of Authors Live everyone's going to be running out and wanting to write something! You're so enthusiastic.

AH: Well, it's a great thing to do. I mean I have always loved...I've been writing since I was ten years old, and I still to this day love writing as much as I did when I started out on this journey. And when I was working, obviously I left university; I had to have a job because I had to support myself. So I would write in the mornings and the evenings, I did the job in the day and worked mornings, nights, whenever. And that's how it was.

JF: That's amazing. Do you find time still to read? Are you reading anything at the moment?

AH: Of course I read. Every single day I read. It's very, very important for me to have books on the go. I've just finished a wonderful thriller called Kolymisky Heights which was a really amazing adult thriller. And I will never have a day where I don't read something. Reading to me is still as much a pleasure as writing.

JF: Gosh, that's interesting, because so many writers say that. I mean I think all of them say, especially to young people, if you're thinking about writing or indeed just it doesn't matter, if you're thinking about writing or not, but reading is so important. Read as much as possible. But I did wonder whether sometimes if you are writing it might get a bit confusing, if you're in your own world and you're reading something else?

AH: I mean I stop work at around about ten o'clock at night and go to bed, and then I open a book and read for an hour. But when I talk to young people, I'm always wary. If you talk about reading being important, reading being good for you and reading making you a better person somehow, most kids would say oh, just leave it out. I don't want to know, that's rubbish.

But all I'm doing is telling you that I was not successful at school. I was a very, very stupid, rather overweight child, bottom of every single class. And I found myself, I found my life in books, in the library, in reading. Because once I found story and connected with story, all the unhappiness in my childhood disappeared and I began to dream, and that's where it all came from. Tintin books, books by a man called Willard Price, I used to read those as a kid. Later on James Bond books. I didn't read great literature, I was just reading stories. But that's what prevented me from becoming an abject failure really. Which is why when I do these talks now and I'm talking to schools all over the country through this broadcast, I don't mean to preach to you, I don't mean to come here like some kind of teacher, but that was my experience.

JF: Interesting, actually, because at the heart of everything you said is the story and storytelling, and how lovely that you live somewhere, where as you said, Charles Dickens' characters are. Because Charles Dickens is an absolute master, but it's all about those stories that had you on the edge of your seat. You want to know what happens next, what happens next.

AH: But that's true. People think of Charles Dickens, I don't know if any of you have read any, you're probably much too young. One day maybe somebody will slam one of those books down in front of you and you'll think oh my goodness, how am I going to get through this. But actually, the almost funny thing about Dickens is, he's a very serious, posh, important writer, but he is, as you correctly say, a wonderful storyteller. You read his books to find out what's going to happen next. His characters are so funny and disgusting and silly and larger than life and there's violence in his books and there's twists and turns. So that's why he's such a great writer. He's obviously a better writer than me, but he's always a great storyteller.

JF: Well, thank you very much indeed. You might want to have another little sip of water because we've now got lots of questions. Can you imagine, we're inundated with questions from people around the country, and of course lots of people watching. I'm going to put on my specs now to read some of your questions. Apologies if we don't get to your question but we're going to try and get through as many as possible, and we'll also have some question from our lovely audience here.

So Anthony, Corin, at Queen Elizabeth II High School on the Isle of Man, hi Corin, says what would you say is the most important stage in writing a book and why?

AH: Corin, that is a really, really good question. How lovely to be talking to the Isle of Man. We filmed quite a lot of Stormbreaker on the Isle of Man.

JF: Aha, yes.

AH: So I have been there and I had a very good time there. What is the most important stage? Oh, that is a tricky one.

I would've said first of all thinking up the idea, having the idea and knowing that it is an idea that's going to work and wanting to write that idea. And I would say the second most important phase is what I've said already, which is the structuring, the planning of the book or the television series or the film. The writing can be a bit of a slog sometimes. It's 100,000 words for a novel. But that's important in a different way. But I think if I was going to answer your question it would be the thinking and planning.

JF: Great, thank you very much indeed. Jemima from Bushwood Junior School in Buckinghamshire says I loved reading the Man with the Yellow Face. Do you have any advice for young horror writers?

AH: Oh, wow, thank you for that. Jemima did you say?

JF: Yes, Jemima.

AH: It's a very nasty story that one. The Man with the Yellow Face is one of my nastier stories, and when I do my horror stories I do always tend to come up with some pretty grim ideas. I don't know where they come from. Advice, if you're going to write horror stories I would say first of all don't be too violent, don't put too much blood in it, knives and stuff. And be careful because...and a lot of people find that offensive, particularly teachers. Teachers do not like blood in their stories very much. I think real horror is something with a twist, something that you don't see coming. Something that is out of the corner of your eye.

I mean the Man with the Yellow Face, the shock of it is the last line, when you realise what that whole story is about. Actually within the story there is nothing too nasty in the description, it's just the idea. So I think have a good idea, have an idea that is surprising and twisty and leave the blood alone.

JF: Thank you very much indeed. We've got pupils at Campie Primary in East Lothian, hmm, do you find it hard to kill off characters?

AH: Yes, I do actually. I did kill off one or two characters in the Alex Rider books and quite a lot of readers got quite upset with me about it. And by and large I do have a rule, which is that I never kill children in my books. I have two sons and the idea

of losing them is too horrible to even have a smile. So very, very few young people actually die in my books.

The people I do love killing my books are the villains. One of the things I quite enjoy in the Alex Rider books is thinking up a really, really good villain and then thinking of a really good way to get rid of them. So that I quite enjoy doing.

I think death in books should have a smile to it if possible. The horror stories are full of children coming to unpleasant ends, but always, well, nearly always, with a smile.

JF: That's an interesting balancing act. Now, we have a couple of questions from the audience, so would our first two questioners come on up and you can ask your questions? Come on, that's great. You can have a round of applause to encourage them. Thank you. [applause]

And what's your name and which school are you from?

Boy1: Mark from Quarter Primary.

JF: It's lovely to have you here. And what is your question for Anthony?

Boy1: Do you ever get writer's block?

JF: Mark, do I...writer's block is something I have never ever had, not in my whole life. And the reason for it is quite simple. I'm always working on at least three different things, as we've been talking about. A book, a television series, a film, a bit of journalism, a play, whatever. And if I find the ideas aren't coming on one of them I just switch to a different one and try that instead. So I avoid the writer's block. If I don't feel like writing, and it does happen sometimes, I never sit at my desk staring at a blank sheet of paper. I get out, I go for a walk, I go to the cinema, I go shopping, I do anything, go to a museum, go to an art gallery. I enjoy myself and when I come back I want to write. So no, I don't have writer's blocks.

JF: Brilliant question, thank you very much indeed. And what's your name? Where are you from? Which school?

Girl1: Hayley and High Mill.

JF: What's your question?

Girl1: What was your favourite book as a child?

AH: My favourite book as a child? Well, Hayley, I think the first book I loved...I said to you I wasn't a clever kid, I liked the Tintin books because I wasn't really up to reading a whole book with too many words; I wasn't clever. So anyone here read Tintin? A few hands going up over there...

JF: Yeah, yeah, quite a few.

AH: You read Tintin?

JF: I do...

AH: I love Tintin. And eventually I got to work on the Tintin films which is quite exciting, further down the line. Then in read, as I said, the Willard Price novels. They're still in print today and I think they're really good if you can find them. A cannibal adventure, lion adventure, whale adventure, they've always got adventure in the title. And they're really, really well-written. So those were two of the books that I really enjoyed as a child. As I say, I then went onto Ian Fleming and James Bond. And by the time I was 11 and 12 I'd really discovered that I just loved reading books.

JF: Great, thank you very much. Do you want to go back to your seats?

AH: Thank you.

JF: A round of applause for Mark and Hayley. [applause] Thank you very much for your excellent questions, lovely. And we've got some more from around the country now. Oh, here we go, Charlotte from Braehead Primary in Aberdeen City; are there any other jobs that you would like to have other than an author? [chuckles]

AH: Ah, Charlotte, well...I'm not very good at anything actually. I mean the only thing I'm really good at is writing. But if writing wasn't possible, I've often thought, I'd quite like to be an actor because that would be quite funny. But also I'd actually quite like to be a teacher, because what I've been doing in my life really is showing my enthusiasm for books and reading. If I couldn't do it as a writer I could do it still as a teacher. And teach other people's books and other people's writing. So I probably wouldn't be a very good teacher, I'm not very...I don't have the patience for it.

JF: I think you would be.

AH: Well, that's what I would do.

JF: Pupils at Glenwood High School in Fife say are you happy with how the Stormbreaker film turned out?

AH: I was happy to a certain extent. If the film had been more successful in America then they'd have made Point Blank and Evil Strike and Skeleton Key and they'd have made the whole lot. But because the film didn't work in America there was only that one film made. So I wasn't happy with that.

And the other thing that I thought was wrong with the film, I did think it was good, I thought it had loads of good things in it, it was just too young. It wasn't quite violent enough for me. I don't love violence on the screen particular, but I think if a character is going to be seen to be in danger, then there has got to be the threat of violence, so you've got to see the violence. And I think that the film was just a little bit too young and a little bit too soft. I thought Alex Pettyfer was great though.

JF: Oh yeah, totally. Before we run out of time let's have our final questioner from the audience. Come on up. And she can have a round of applause. [applause] Oh, I can see that you're from Leadhills Primary, and what's your name?

Girl2: Ellen.

JF: Ellen, and what's your question for Anthony?

Girl2: What's your favourite book to movie adaptation?

JF: Your favourite book to movie adaptation?

AH: Wow, that's an interesting question and I'm not sure I've got an answer for it. Possibly the Lord of the Rings. I think that Peter Jackson did a fantastic job turning the Lord of the Rings, not so much the Hobbit, but the Lord of the Rings, the way he filmed it was really... It's a funny thing, Ellen, that actually a lot of books don't work when they're adapted into films. And this is because of what I was saying earlier; when you read a book you make a film in your head that nobody can beat. It's your film and it's almost impossible to do better than what you imagine. But Peter Jackson with the Lord of the Rings made something so fantastic and so visual and spectacular and well done that I thought it was a brilliant adaption. So that's my favourite book to film.

JF: Thank you very much for your question. A round of applause for Ellen please? Thank you. [applause]

Time is catching up with us. What do we have here? Would you write an autobiography says Amy in Braehead Primary in Aberdeen?

AH: Amy, thank you for that question. Would I write an autobiography? No, I wouldn't. My life has been too much sitting in a room writing books, I'm not sure anybody would be interested in it. I'd quite like to write a book about writing one day. I have an idea to do a book about what the life of the writer is, working in television, in film, in theatre. I'm going to call it ten million words, because that's how many words I think I've written in my lifetime. But it won't be an autobiography, not about me and my parents and all the rest of that. No, someone else can do that.

JF: We have what do you think about the illustrator's style of drawing? This must be with the books.

AH: Well, the covers of the Alex Rider books I think are fantastic. Also in my other books like Granny and the Switch and Groosham Grange, Tony Ross who is a very well-known artist and does the David Walliams books very, very well, he's done the illustrations for my books and I think they're hilarious and they're brilliant. In fact, I was given an original Tony Ross for my birthday by my publisher...

JF: Oh, how lovely.

AH: ...which is lovely. It shows a whole lot of evil grannies playing poker and that's going to go into my office.

But by and large my books don't have illustrations, because as I've said, I'm trying to create pictures with words.

JF: Thank you for that question. Luke from Braehead Primary in Aberdeen City, it goes to this final one I think, Amber also from Braehead in Aberdeen, which author would you co-work with on a book and why?

AH: Oh, Luke and Amber, what an interesting question. Is that the last one we're going to have as well?

JF: I think it might be...

AH: What a tricky one to finish with.

JF: ...we'll see. I might squeeze in another one.

AH: I am not very good with collaborating with anyone actually. I'm quite ferocious, I have my ideas, I like to do things my own way. And when I'm writing books I'm not sure I could collaborate. But if I did, oh my goodness, I mean who would you want? I can't think of anybody?

JF: I don't know.

AH: I'd collaborate with Darren Shan. Actually I like Darren Shan, or Charlie Higson. They both need my help actually a little bit with their books. But no, there'll be annoyed with me for saying that.

JF: Oh, that's...

AH: But I like their writing, so maybe I'd collaborate with them.

JF: That's a really tricky question. I'm going to give you one to answer in ten seconds. Out of all of your adventures, is there an adventure that you've written that you'd like to experience yourself?

AH: I spent a year as a jackaroo, which is a cowboy in Australia. And I had a terrific, very exciting time. I nearly got killed twice. And if I was to turn any part of my life into an adventure, it would be that part. I'll also tell you I'm the only author you'll ever meet who knows how to turn a living cow into every single steak with just a penknife.

JF: [chuckles] There's one for all the vegetarians out there! [laughs] Lovely. Thank you very much indeed. Anthony, you are just a ball of energy and undiminished in the face of waking up without a voice. Hasn't he done well? Sadly we have run out of time. Thank you very much indeed.

AH: Well, thank you, Janice, you've been wonderful.

JF: Oh, thank you, and thanks to our lovely audience here, and everyone who watched out there. I know that we're going to go and revisit the Alex Rider books and all of Anthony's other books too. What a year it's been for him with his 15th anniversary, a great opportunity for us to go back and enjoy them all over again. And maybe imagine the places we're in, we can write books about these places. I'm going to go off and maybe write something about here I think later on. But thank all of you, thanks to you...

AH: Thank you everyone.

JF: ...and a huge round of applause please...

AH: Thank you. Thanks everyone at school, thank you.

JF: ...for the wonderful Anthony Horowitz. [applause]

AH: Thank you very much everyone. Thank you here, that's great. Thank you, Janice.