

CHARLIE HIGSON Q&A



Charlie Higson photograph
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WHERE DID YOU GET THE IDEA FOR **THE ENEMY?**

I had two starting points for writing *The Enemy*. I wanted to write a book where all the adults disappear and kids have the run of the place – that's always been a great fantasy of mine. Wouldn't it be great to live in London if you could go wherever you wanted? You could live in Buckingham Palace, or go to the Tower of London and try on all the suits of armour. But I also wanted to write a scary book, different from the Young Bond series. My son is really into zombies – he's fascinated by them, but they also scare him a lot. After I'd written each chapter of the book I'd read it to him at night, in an attempt to scare him, and I kept on until I gave him nightmares!

DID YOU TAKE INSPIRATION FROM ANY OTHER BOOKS?

Yes. *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson, which was written in the 1950s, is really the grandfather of this kind of story – about a man trying to survive when everyone else has become infected with a disease. There are also parallels with *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, but in that book it's all about the things that would go horribly wrong if you leave kids alone by themselves. I wanted to show a world where the children had already been through that process and where they're now trying to put the world back together and establish a society without grown-ups.

DID THE STORY CHANGE MUCH FROM YOUR ORIGINAL IDEA WHILE YOU WERE WRITING IT?

It did actually. No matter how much you plan what's going to happen, when you start writing the book always takes on a life of its own. You might roughly know what's going to happen at the beginning and the end, but you don't know how you're going to get there. For instance, when I started, I didn't really know which of the kids were going to live or die. And I'd originally planned for there to be a lot more about the gang war between the two groups of children - the kids in Morrisons and the kids in Waitrose - but when I started writing I found that I wanted to move the book past that point and focus on their battle with the adults instead.

DO YOU FIND IT EASY TO KILL OFF CHARACTERS?

Yes and no. If you've decided early on that a certain character has got to go, you start to distance yourself from them. But there were other characters that I'd thought I was going to kill off, and then realized I'd become too attached and couldn't do it. But even when you've decided that you're going to get rid of someone halfway through and you manage to go through with it, you need to look back and make sure they've been given enough of a presence before that point to really make their death hit home. And that can sometimes be a bit painful. When I was doing events for Young Bond, kids would often say they really enjoyed the books but that they always knew that James was going to be all right, because he grows up to be James Bond. So with *The Enemy*, I wanted to make it clear from the start that no one was safe.

DID YOU HAVE TO DO MUCH RESEARCH FOR THE BOOK?

I actually got in touch with Waitrose and told them that I was writing a book that was going to be set in a supermarket, and asked if they could show me around. They were thrilled - and even after I'd told them it was a book about zombies, they were suggesting places in the store where the kids might hide, or where the zombies could get in. I discovered a little courtyard on the roof, which you could easily set up with a few barbeques and be able to live there quite happily, so it turned out to be a good setting for the opening chapters.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SCENE IN THE BOOK?

I like the sequence in the swimming pool near the beginning. You can imagine the scene really vividly, with adults rising out of the green dirty water and the vending machine floating on the top.

HOW DID THE GROWN-UPS GET THE DISEASE? WILL THERE BE A CURE?

Because all the grown-ups died or became diseased before anyone had time to work out what was going on, the kids don't really know what caused it. They're constantly guessing and making up theories. A bit like me. I'm hoping to hit on a good answer before the end of the series. I don't think the kids will be able to come up with a cure before the end of book three, though.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE KIDS TURN FOURTEEN? DO THEY BECOME INFECTED?

You'll have to read the rest of the series! That's something that's definitely playing on the kids' minds, though - will they get the chance to grow up, or will they become zombies too?

CAN YOU TELL US WHAT YOUR PLANS ARE FOR THE NEXT BOOK?

I want to have a look at what else is going on around London. What other kids might be up to. It'll obviously all tie in with book one, but I want to expand it quite a lot. I've got an idea that the different groups of children around London all have their own views on what caused the illness - and this makes them act very differently. In *The Enemy*, we meet David who lives at Buckingham Palace and wants to restore the monarchy, but there might be another group of kids, who are set up at the Houses of Parliament, and they believe the disease was the fault of politicians, and are trying to establish a new government. Then there are kids living at St Pauls and the Tower of London, who also have their own ideas. So there'll be lots of new characters and locations introduced over the next two books. I want the series to grow and have a real epic feel to it, though we will never lose sight of the central characters.

