

# Author Neil Broadfoot launches *Falling Fast*

✘ Twenty-five years ago, [Neil Broadfoot](#) made a promise to his Gran; that promise sustained him through all the trials and tribulations of writing his first novel. On Wednesday night at [Looking Glass Books](#) Neil introduced [Falling Fast](#); his Gran, he says, would have needed a whisky and soda to cope with the body count in the book, but she would still have been very proud.

Neil, a former journalist, was in conversation with his agent **Bob McDevitt** of [Jenny Brown Associates](#); Bob opened the evening by reading the first few cracking paragraphs of the book to an appreciative audience. Neil has put his journalistic experience to good use; there is no faffing about in this story – within minutes a girl has fallen from the Scott Monument and crashed in graphic manner into Princes Street Gardens. Who she was and why she fell are questions by which we are instantly hooked, and the story moves on at a fast pace.

Inevitably there will be comparisons with that other Edinburgh author – no, not JK Rowling...but Neil says that although he was obviously conscious of [Ian Rankin](#)'s Rebus novels, every writer tells his own story in his own voice. He just set out to write a good book, but like everyone he's been influenced by what he's read over the years; Rankin, [Stuart MacBride](#), [Christopher Brookmyre](#) and [Iain Banks](#) are all great favourites. [Stephen King](#) novels borrowed from the school library were Neil's earliest influences; he especially admires the plot-drive structure of [Carrie](#), and used to write horror stories to keep his school friends awake at night. Eventually he decided to 'stop mucking about' and work on something that would grab readers from page one and keep them reading. He doesn't rule out a return to the horror genre though, and hopes that he's

managed to emulate some of King's style in *Falling Fast*.

✘ Journalism taught Neil to look at the hard facts – the who? where? what? when? and why? – and although writing a novel reverses this order it is still the why? in particular that drives his work. Whilst Neil admits that he sometimes finds it hard to build emotion back into his writing, his newspaper experience made the editing process much easier, saying 'You leave the ego at the door.' If a journalist can see the sense in an editorial suggestion, he'll do it; there is no point in being precious about a story. Bob explained, however, that agents can never be as dictatorial as press editors; it's a two-way conversation and agents are just readers who can suggest things that might improve a book, with the author generally still having the final say. Neil feels he's been exceptionally lucky to have both an agent and a publisher who understand his work. Bob advised him to enter *Falling Fast* for the [Dundee International Book Prize](#); it was longlisted and although it didn't win, it was spotted by Sara Hunt of [Saraband Books](#). Sara was looking to start Contraband, a new crime imprint and tweeted Neil to express interest; from then on the process has been painless. He's also had the good fortune to have great support from his wife Fiona and family – including the smallest member who came along on Wednesday night and had a great time exercising her lungs when all this book talk got a bit too much...

✘ Neil believes you should write about what you know; he now works as a Communications Officer for the Scottish Government, and politics soon rear their head in *Falling Fast*, when the remains splattered over the grass where office workers are eating their lunch turn out to belong to an MSP's daughter. He started with the bare bones of a 'twisty-turny' plot then fleshed it out to show that everyone has good and bad points, and as he did so he found that some characters became more complex and interesting. He calls the first draft the 'chaos version', in which the writer pours everything onto

the page – but the writer knows what’s going to happen, so needs to go back and hide a few things, to shape the story and make the reader’s experience satisfying. The quality of the relationships in *Falling Fast* is, says Bob, one of its greatest strengths. Although Neil had a rough idea of the story’s ending before he started to write, the motive for the crime only came to him in the second draft; the characters informed it.

Neil’s already nearly finished book two, in fact he’s now working on how the plot of this second novel will fit in with books three and four. Being shortlisted at Dundee has given him much more confidence about his writing, although he still finds it ‘surreal’ to see his family and friends reading his book. His work colleagues say they’re amazed that such a quiet person could produce such a thriller. A publishing deal has given him the space to expand his imaginary universe, and although the next four books are his main focus just now, he’s open to any ideas that come along. He hasn’t yet managed to give up the day job, but he’s working on it; he tries to write something every day.

Neil Broadfoot used secretly to make spaces on bookshop shelves for the novels he hadn’t quite written; now, after years of hard work, those spaces are filled by *Falling Fast*. As Neil says, ‘it’s surreal.’

[Falling Fast](#) by Neil Broadfoot is published by Contraband, an imprint of Saraband Books and is available from [Looking Glass Books](#), Simpson’s Loan.

Looking Glass Books hosts a continuing programme of writers – see [website](#) for details of forthcoming events.