

00;00;01;24 - 00;00;03;20

Welcome to Micro Talk,

00;00;03;20 - 00;00;06;20

the podcast by the Microbiology Society.

00;00;06;20 - 00;00;10;04

I'm Adam, the content and engagement manager here at the Society.

00;00;10;10 - 00;00;15;13

We are going to get a little bit spooky today as I speak to Doctor Georgi.

00;00;15;13 - 00;00;19;25

Was FMU, a lecturer in microbiology at the University of Hull.

00;00;20;06 - 00;00;24;24

Georgia is heavily involved in the society and through the champion scheme,

00;00;24;24 - 00;00;27;27

he has been provided funding from the society to conduct

00;00;27;27 - 00;00;32;12

an annual spooky story competition named Hocus Pocus.

00;00;32;18 - 00;00;36;00

Today I will be asking him
how he has merged storytelling,

00;00;36;00 - 00;00;39;02
outreach and Halloween with microbiology.

00;00;39;11 - 00;00;43;18
With help from judges
and a few cameos from the society staff.

00;00;44;01 - 00;00;46;02
I'm looking forward to hearing more.

00;00;46;02 - 00;00;48;21
So, Georges, welcome to the podcast.

00;00;48;21 - 00;00;50;00
Thank you for joining me today.

00;00;50;00 - 00;00;55;07
First thing I would like to ask
is what is hocus pocus?

00;00;55;24 - 00;00;56;03
Right.

00;00;56;03 - 00;01;00;11
So cockroach pocus is a nationwide,
scary story competition

00;01;00;27 - 00;01;05;22

that, involves,
serious microbiological topics like,

00;01;06;01 - 00;01;09;29

antibiotic resistance
and biofilms and also,

00;01;11;06 - 00;01;14;06

microbes, pathogenic microbes, in general,

00;01;14;12 - 00;01;19;01

and, the infections of the class,
and the general approach for,

00;01;19;07 - 00;01;25;02

raising public awareness about such topics
that, very, especially

00;01;25;02 - 00;01;29;01

antibiotic resistance is, is way,
way too serious a public health hazard.

00;01;29;01 - 00;01;33;09

So it's good to raise public awareness
about these, issues.

00;01;33;20 - 00;01;37;22

And, also, I, encourage young people, to,

00;01;38;24 - 00;01;41;13

use this creative way,

00;01;41;13 - 00;01;44;00

to, sharpen their creative skills.

00;01;44;00 - 00;01;46;05

Writing is such a good idea.

00;01;46;05 - 00;01;47;08

Know to be going on for.

00;01;47;08 - 00;01;49;28

So we started in 2019.

00;01;49;28 - 00;01;52;07

That was our first,

00;01;52;07 - 00;01;53;25

round.

00;01;53;25 - 00;01;57;11

We had only few, entries
because it was a competition.

00;01;57;25 - 00;02;01;10

But then things improved in 2021 and 2022.

00;02;01;19 - 00;02;04;18

We had the 2030 entries, every year.

00;02;04;23 - 00;02;07;17

So, things became more interesting.

00;02;07;17 - 00;02;08;10

Since then,

00;02;08;10 - 00;02;12;10

before we continue, I think it'd be great
to hear some extracts from these stories.

00;02;12;10 - 00;02;17;04

And to help us with this, I've asked
a few members of the society to assist.

00;02;17;04 - 00;02;22;09

Here is free online, the society's member
engagement and communities manager

00;02;22;17 - 00;02;26;03

to read an extract from Micro to macro.

00;02;26;21 - 00;02;28;26

Doctor Bowman's mistake.

00;02;28;26 - 00;02;30;04

It had been 20 years

00;02;30;04 - 00;02;33;07

since the new generation of antibiotics
had first been unveiled,

00;02;34;07 - 00;02;37;06

revolutionizing

medicine with high specificity,

00;02;37;06 - 00;02;40;29

unprecedented evolve ability
and non immunogenic responses.

00;02;41;06 - 00;02;42;29

Everyone was happy.

00;02;42;29 - 00;02;45;22

Well, almost everyone. That is,

00;02;45;22 - 00;02;47;29

in a world where a golden bullet

00;02;47;29 - 00;02;51;14

whose importance rivaled
the discovery of penicillin was.

00;02;51;14 - 00;02;54;14

In such common usage,
nothing could possibly go wrong.

00;02;55;03 - 00;02;58;01

This utopia was the predictions
and hopes of millions

00;02;58;01 - 00;03;01;03

in the past,
but only very few knew what was coming.

00;03;01;06 - 00;03;04;08

Only those in the know
could begin to fathom their future.

00;03;04;12 - 00;03;07;11

That would soon become the present,

00;03;07;11 - 00;03;10;11

truly, sooner
than anyone could have ever imagined.

00;03;11;06 - 00;03;13;29

I am curious to know how.

00;03;13;29 - 00;03;17;23

How did it all start and where did where
did the idea come from?

00;03;18;19 - 00;03;22;28

I'm a fantasy that actually,
and I was reading a book in 2019.

00;03;22;28 - 00;03;26;10

I was reading in an anthology,
by Michael Moorcock.

00;03;27;04 - 00;03;30;28

And then I thought that it would be
something interesting to be applied,

00;03;31;14 - 00;03;35;09

first in my teaching
and then, outreach, event.

00;03;35;12 - 00;03;39;14

So maybe we can, eventually,
if I get enough stories over the years,

00;03;39;26 - 00;03;43;17

I can maybe publish
them as an anthology book or,

00;03;45;04 - 00;03;48;28

make, like an e-book or, even, audiobooks.

00;03;49;25 - 00;03;53;04

There's several ideas,
about taking this forward

00;03;53;07 - 00;03;57;17

is, is writing
and storytelling a passion of yours?

00;03;57;17 - 00;04;00;04

Anyway, away from microbiology?

00;04;00;04 - 00;04;01;04

Yeah.

00;04;01;04 - 00;04;04;18

I'm also, interested in writing.

00;04;05;05 - 00;04;08;09

I have, I have some drafts of,
fantasy novels and things like that.

00;04;09;17 - 00;04;12;17

So in addition to my,

00;04;13;01 - 00;04;14;16

scientific work, but,

00;04;14;16 - 00;04;17;24

yeah, I think it's a very important skill,
and that,

00;04;18;17 - 00;04;22;14

it helps, everyone,
but especially scientists to,

00;04;23;05 - 00;04;27;18

improve their, imagination and,
which is a very important skill

00;04;28;00 - 00;04;30;29

for everyone, but,
especially for scientists,

00;04;30;29 - 00;04;33;29

and microbiologists in particular,

00;04;34;29 - 00;04;36;23

yes. And, of course,

00;04;36;23 - 00;04;41;19

it's also very important when you teach,
because people want to hear

00;04;41;24 - 00;04;44;23

when you teach, a group of students,
they want to hear

00;04;44;23 - 00;04;47;14

a coherent story with,

00;04;47;14 - 00;04;49;18

they want, you to highlight the impact.

00;04;49;18 - 00;04;52;22

So all of these storytelling
is very important in, in teaching as well.

00;04;53;03 - 00;04;53;23

Amazing.

00;04;53;23 - 00;04;56;22

And kind of what of your reactions
been when,

00;04;57;06 - 00;05;01;02

someone has submitted a story and you've
had to kind of read through them?

00;05;01;02 - 00;05;04;02

What what have you kind of learned
and gained from that?

00;05;04;15 - 00;05;06;27

Every year we get the fantastic stories.

00;05;06;27 - 00;05;10;17

I have a nice collection of 50, 60
stories, and I don't throw anything away.

00;05;11;22 - 00;05;12;11

Because you never

00;05;12;11 - 00;05;15;11

know how it can be used in the future.

00;05;15;17 - 00;05;15;24

Yeah.

00;05;15;24 - 00;05;18;12

So I, I'm surprised,
some of them are really scary.

00;05;18;12 - 00;05;21;20

Really, really
creepy for, Halloween purposes.

00;05;21;20 - 00;05;25;23

And so really nice and, yeah, it's,
I get, like, I get a little,

00;05;25;26 - 00;05;28;26

a lot of, on these stories in terms of,

00;05;28;26 - 00;05;31;25

how to develop character. The,

00;05;32;12 - 00;05;35;12

description, how to,

00;05;35;26 - 00;05;37;14

also make things,

00;05;37;14 - 00;05;40;25

scary, how to link, how to connect.

00;05;41;10 - 00;05;46;06

Interesting microbiological topics
with, the demands of a scary story.

00;05;46;06 - 00;05;48;08

So all these things are very interesting.

00;05;48;08 - 00;05;52;01

So here is Will Thompson,
our policy and engagement officer,

00;05;52;01 - 00;05;56;08

to read an extract from the mansion
at SolarWinds Hollow.

00;05;57;13 - 00;06;00;16

Once upon a time, in the back
alleys and nowhere

00;06;00;29 - 00;06;04;28

in a small town called Sullivan's Hollow,
they left a group of friends,

00;06;05;19 - 00;06;08;19

Max, Alex and Charles, were inseparable.

00;06;08;22 - 00;06;12;20

They met each other when they were three
years old and have been best pal since.

00;06;13;15 - 00;06;16;22

Living in a small community,
everyone knew everyone.

00;06;17;10 - 00;06;20;10

Locals were friendly to their peers,
and this tiny town,

00;06;20;16 - 00;06;23;18

tucked away in a mist valley
surrounded by woods.

00;06;24;09 - 00;06;28;24

On warm, sunny day in midsummer,
Max, Alex and Charles

00;06;28;24 - 00;06;33;12

went for a walk in the woods
and spotted an old abandoned mansion.

00;06;34;00 - 00;06;37;04

Surrounding

it was a huge fence with sun on it

00;06;37;04 - 00;06;41;13

that said do not enter danger

further down the road.

00;06;41;22 - 00;06;44;26

Another sign had the word haunted written
on it.

00;06;45;17 - 00;06;49;22

Skeptical and confused,
and like all curious teenagers,

00;06;50;00 - 00;06;53;06

they ran back to town
and asked around about this mansion.

00;06;53;27 - 00;06;57;24

Everyone warned them to stay away,
but didn't really explain further,

00;06;58;15 - 00;07;01;16

except that strange things
happened in this place.

00;07;03;05 - 00;07;05;16

Well, it's the kind of brief that you,

00;07;05;16 - 00;07;10;23

give people before, because obviously they
it needs to be connected, with science.

00;07;10;23 - 00;07;12;29

Like how how do you kind of bridge that?

Yeah.

00;07;12;29 - 00;07;17;19

So we usually send the poster out,
and also through the social media

00;07;17;19 - 00;07;21;14

as well, that has, few bullet points
with the rules.

00;07;21;14 - 00;07;24;19

So the stories have to be between 500

00;07;24;19 - 00;07;27;19

words and 2000 words.

00;07;27;22 - 00;07;31;07

Because we don't want,
huge stories on one page one.

00;07;31;07 - 00;07;34;08

So we have to be between one page and,

00;07;36;11 - 00;07;38;11

four pages maximum.

00;07;38;11 - 00;07;39;09

That that's one.

00;07;39;09 - 00;07;42;20

Then we have, they have to include,

00;07;43;09 - 00;07;46;19

antibiotics,

microbes or biofilms in the story.

00;07;47;06 - 00;07;48;01

It doesn't have to be.

00;07;48;01 - 00;07;51;20

It shouldn't

be something, completely different.

00;07;51;20 - 00;07;54;18

I like vampires or,

00;07;54;18 - 00;07;55;18

things like that. Yeah.

00;07;55;18 - 00;07;56;25

So very simple guidelines.

00;07;56;25 - 00;07;59;28

And then the criteria,
also given to the evaluation,

00;08;00;09 - 00;08;04;16
we have a very nice evaluation
panel always made of colleagues

00;08;04;16 - 00;08;05;21
from different universities.

00;08;07;08 - 00;08;07;29
So we

00;08;07;29 - 00;08;11;25
were all colleagues over here
that evaluated their stories.

00;08;12;02 - 00;08;15;23
So, for the evaluation panel,
we also, tell them to,

00;08;16;17 - 00;08;18;29
make sure that the story's scary

00;08;18;29 - 00;08;21;28
and that there is some scientific element
in it.

00;08;22;09 - 00;08;25;08
And, also, they keep the, the word limit.

00;08;25;08 - 00;08;29;27

And the good thing is, I have a very nice network of ambassadors, as we call them.

00;08;30;18 - 00;08;33;18

So people at different universities and schools that,

00;08;34;02 - 00;08;37;02

encourage their students to,

00;08;37;15 - 00;08;38;13

to write these stories.

00;08;38;13 - 00;08;42;06

So I have 18 people so far doing that every year.

00;08;42;06 - 00;08;44;13

So, like promoting the event.

00;08;44;13 - 00;08;48;11

And for our final extract, I have popped into the society

00;08;48;11 - 00;08;52;16

CEO office, Peter Cook Reef, and he was very happy to partake.

00;08;53;02 - 00;08;56;27

This is an extract

from Unresolved Injustices.

00;08;57;17 - 00;09;01;21

He proceeds to ask Mary,
do you have anything to say?

00;09;02;03 - 00;09;06;14

Mary is still on the floor
trying to force out the proper sentence

00;09;06;14 - 00;09;11;09

despite her
shaken state, he was ill, infected

00;09;12;10 - 00;09;13;16

by the water.

00;09;13;16 - 00;09;14;14

We both were.

00;09;14;14 - 00;09;19;27

But he never got better
and that's why he he.

00;09;20;02 - 00;09;21;22

Blasphemy! Shouts Mr.

00;09;21;22 - 00;09;25;14

Kramer as he yanked her hair,
forcing their eyes to meet.

00;09;26;04 - 00;09;29;04

He leans close to her face.

00;09;29;04 - 00;09;32;05

There is no way water
does that to a person.

00;09;32;15 - 00;09;36;07

And if so, it must have been
you who meddled with it.

00;09;36;17 - 00;09;41;00

Mary remained silent,
and her expression went blank.

00;09;41;09 - 00;09;46;12

Mr. Kramer let go of her hair, and she
remains on the floor, facing the ground.

00;09;47;16 - 00;09;49;18

The courtroom, alongside Mary,

00;09;49;18 - 00;09;52;18

stays silent, convinced of her guilt,

00;09;52;23 - 00;09;55;23

awaiting the judge's verdict.

00;09;56;16 - 00;09;59;16

The people that you know
to survive this story,

00;10;00;00 - 00;10;03;25

do they have to be in the science world
or interested in science?

00;10;03;25 - 00;10;05;18

Or can it literally be anyone?

00;10;05;18 - 00;10;07;21

It can be anyone.

00;10;07;21 - 00;10;12;06

From secondary school students
to university students.

00;10;12;06 - 00;10;14;17

We have a lot of entry
from university students.

00;10;15;22 - 00;10;18;08

But also
it can be any member of the public.

00;10;18;08 - 00;10;21;20

Have you kind of had any feedback
throughout the years from

00;10;21;20 - 00;10;24;27

the people that have had the opportunity
to write stories? Yes.

00;10;25;02 - 00;10;28;02

I usually send some feedback
questionnaires after the event.

00;10;28;02 - 00;10;31;21

And we show that, you know, very like,

00;10;31;28 - 00;10;34;22

taking part in the competition,

00;10;34;22 - 00;10;38;09

you know, I'm a it makes you feel
very well because I'm, it's, it's,

00;10;39;18 - 00;10;42;18

little things that we do
to affect people's,

00;10;42;27 - 00;10;48;00

lives and decisions and push them towards
science and microbiology in particular.

00;10;48;22 - 00;10;49;25

That's that's very important.

00;10;49;25 - 00;10;54;11

So I feel very proud, actually,
about what is the future of focus.

00;10;54;11 - 00;10;55;03

Focus.

00;10;55;03 - 00;10;58;24

First of all, I would like to I need that
for at least another four years.

00;10;59;13 - 00;11;01;26

And I'm very happy that I get the support

00;11;01;26 - 00;11;05;23

from the Microbiology society
as part of the Champion scheme.

00;11;05;23 - 00;11;08;28

I'm sure that, we will be able to do this
for a few more years.

00;11;09;18 - 00;11;12;26

And, secondly, I have ideas about,

00;11;14;14 - 00;11;15;14

turning this into an

00;11;15;14 - 00;11;19;12

anthology book, with 50, 60 stories,
perhaps,

00;11;20;05 - 00;11;23;05

it can also be in, audiobook or e-book.

00;11;23;22 - 00;11;27;04

And, I'm also in touch with some people

from the

00;11;29;00 - 00;11;30;27

Drama Society here at the university.

00;11;30;27 - 00;11;32;02

In the theater.

00;11;32;02 - 00;11;35;02

How how, like a theater that,

00;11;35;14 - 00;11;39;18

they're interested in turning this
into a theatrical, adaptation.

00;11;39;18 - 00;11;42;17

So there are plenty of ideas.

00;11;42;22 - 00;11;43;05

Depends.

00;11;43;05 - 00;11;46;04

A lot of them on funding, of course. And,

00;11;46;22 - 00;11;47;27

for people's time.

00;11;47;27 - 00;11;50;27

But, I think was a great potential.

00;11;51;01 - 00;11;51;20

George. Yes.

00;11;51;20 - 00;11;53;21

Thank you so much for joining me today.

00;11;53;21 - 00;11;55;05

Thanks a lot for inviting me.

00;11;55;05 - 00;11;58;03

You have been listening to Microbe Talk.

00;11;58;03 - 00;12;02;23

Please give us a like or share

and we will catch you in the next episode.