



**ALEX** ACTION  
ADRENALINE  
ADVENTURE

**RIDER**

**NIGHTSHADE**

A silhouette of Alex Rider standing inside a white target symbol, which is part of the book's branding.

"EXPLOSIVE, THRILLING, ACTION-PACKED — MEET ALEX RIDER." GUARDIAN

**ANTHONY HOROWITZ**

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“Explosive, thrilling, action-packed – meet Alex Rider.”

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***Daily Mirror***

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“The series that has re-invented the spy genre.”

***Independent***



## **Titles by Anthony Horowitz**

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*Point Blanc*

*Skeleton Key*

*Eagle Strike*

*Scorpia*

*Ark Angel*

*Snakehead*

*Crocodile Tears*

*Scorpia Rising*

*Russian Roulette*

*Never Say Die*

*Secret Weapon*

*Nightshade*

The Power of Five (Book One): *Raven's Gate*

The Power of Five (Book Two): *Evil Star*

The Power of Five (Book Three): *Nightrise*

The Power of Five (Book Four): *Necropolis*

The Power of Five (Book Five): *Oblivion*

*The Devil and His Boy*

*Granny*

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*Return to Groosham Grange*

*The Switch*

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The Diamond Brothers books:

*The Falcon's Malteser*

*Public Enemy Number Two*

*South by South East*

*The French Confection*

*The Greek Who Stole Christmas*

*The Blurred Man*

*I Know What You Did Last Wednesday*

**ALEX  
RIDER  
NIGHTSHADE**

***ANTHONY HOROWITZ***



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*To OF and BO'C with thanks.*

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First published 2020 by Walker Books Ltd  
87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ

This edition published 2021

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Text © 2020 Stormbreaker Productions Ltd  
Cover illustration © 2020 Walker Books Ltd  
Trademarks Alex Rider™; Boy with Torch Logo™  
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This book has been typeset in Officina Sans

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:  
a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4063-9062-9

[www.walker.co.uk](http://www.walker.co.uk)



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## ***PROLOGUE***

The British Airways Airbus A318 had been kept in a holding pattern before it landed at Heathrow. Looking out of the window, Alex Rider watched the familiar landmarks slide beneath him for a third time. There was the River Thames, snaking its way past Slough and Maidenhead. Then Windsor Castle, built in the eleventh century and now home to the Queen, visible for miles around. In the distance, he could see the first high-rise apartments springing up around the edge of London.

He glanced at Jack Starbright who was dozing in the seat next to him. The two of them were on their way back from a long weekend in Amsterdam ... a treat they had promised themselves ever since they had returned from Smoke City, the industrial compound in Wales where Alex had come face to face with the Grimaldi brothers, the last two survivors of the criminal organization known as Scorpia. The Grimaldis had been planning the kidnap of the century, code

named Steel Claw, and would have succeeded if Alex hadn't stumbled across their path. But it had been a close thing. Alex still woke at night remembering the huge steam train that had come blasting through the night, chasing him as he made for the single tunnel that provided the only means of escape.

So much had happened in the past few weeks. He had thought Jack was dead but discovered she was still alive. That in itself had changed everything for him, lifting a huge weight off his shoulders and giving him a fresh start. She had once been his housekeeper but she had become his closest friend and he had been unable to manage without her. At the same time, he had left America, picking up the pieces of his old life in London: his home, his friends. Jack had gone back to her studies – she hoped to become a lawyer – while Alex had gone back to school. As an added bonus, the two of them had suddenly found themselves with more money than they had ever known. They would be secure for life.

They had earned a weekend away together. It had been an opportunity to walk along the canals, to visit art galleries and coffee shops, to do some shopping, to relax and enjoy life. Above all, they had spent time together, laughing off everything that had happened. Even Mrs Jones, the head of MI6 Special Operations, had urged him to leave his adventures behind him and settle down to a more ordinary life. Alex was convinced that his time as a spy was all behind him now.

He was wrong.

The aircraft had just passed over Cookham, an attractive village on the banks of the River Thames, and if Alex had been able to see twenty thousand feet below, he would have watched for himself as a murder – which had been planned to the last detail several weeks before – was finally put into action.

The security officer sitting outside Clifford Hall on the edge of Cookham had noticed the plane circling and knew at once that it was flight BA 423 from Amsterdam. But then he knew the flight path of every plane that took off from or landed at Heathrow, just as he knew the names of everyone who lived in the village. He could even recognize them by their car number plates: the plumber in his white van, the local magistrate in her Volvo, the bank manager in his new Ford Fiesta. He was sitting in a folding chair next to the main gates with a newspaper in his lap. But he had not read a word of it. His job was to watch, to be ready, always to stay alert. And although he looked half-asleep, his hand was never very far away from the Glock 17 semi-automatic pistol which fitted snugly into the thumb release paddle holster clipped on to his belt, under his jacket. If necessary, he could load, take aim and fire with total accuracy in less than two seconds.

His name was Robert Spencer. He had been Second Lieutenant in Afghanistan until a roadside bomb had crippled him, ending his military career. He was now

a senior officer in Protection Command, a highly specialized division of the London Metropolitan Police. His job was to look after the man who lived at Clifford Hall.

James Clifford – now Lord Clifford – had been a politician for more than forty years, but perhaps the most remarkable thing about him was that in all that time he had always been popular. He was a man who loved his country, who worked hard, who wanted to make a difference. He had been an extremely effective Home Secretary – in fact he had been so successful in his war on organized crime that when he retired, it was decided that he should be given round-the-clock protection ... just in case. He had, after all, made plenty of enemies.

He was retired now and lived with his wife in the handsome country villa that his family had owned for generations. Clifford Hall had the look of a French château, with five bedrooms, a conservatory and a perfect lawn that led all the way to the river with a view of Lock Island on the other side of a narrow stretch of water. Second Lieutenant Spencer had been given a flat above the garage. There were CCTV cameras everywhere and, sitting in front of a bank of screens in his front room, he could see anyone who came near. Life in an English village is very much a matter of routine and after all the time he had spent in Cookham, he had most of the day pinned down to the minute. 8.10 a.m. – the newspapers delivered. 8.25 a.m. – the mail. 9.00 a.m. – Mrs Winters, the

cleaning lady, arrives. 10.15 a.m. – Lady Clifford walks the dogs. And so on. There was almost no chance that anyone would seriously try to hurt Lord Clifford but, as Spencer knew from his time in the army, “almost” wasn’t good enough. He took his job seriously. And he liked Lord Clifford. He wanted to keep the old man safe.

As the British Airways flight curved out of sight, he became aware of two figures approaching the gate and the short drive that led to the front door. His hand slid a few centimetres towards his gun, then stopped as he saw that the visitors were young girls, no more than twelve years old, dressed in the blue and red polo shirts that identified them as Girl Guides. One of them was carrying a wooden tray with a pile of chocolate muffins. They stopped in front of him.

“How can I help you, girls?” Spencer asked.

“Hello. My name is Amy and we’re raising money for our local activity centre,” the first of them replied. She had fair hair, framing a pretty face, with a scattering of freckles over her cheeks.

“We made them ourselves,” the other said. She was a year or two younger, a black girl with glasses and hair tied back in pigtails. “I’m Jasmine,” she added.

“They’re fifty pence each.”

“Or you can buy three for a pound.”

Spencer smiled. “That’s very kind of you, but I’m afraid I’m not into cakes.” He patted his stomach.

"I have to watch my weight."

"Would the people in the house like to buy some?" Jasmine, the girl with the pigtails, asked.

"I don't think so." Spencer shook his head. The truth was that he wouldn't allow anyone to pass through the gates unless they were expected; not even someone as innocent as a Girl Guide.

But then a voice called out behind him. "I'd love a chocolate muffin. I'll have it with my afternoon cup of tea."

Spencer turned round. The front door was open. As luck would have it, Lord Clifford had chosen that moment to come into the garden for a little fresh air. Spencer stood up as the man he was paid to protect arrived at the front gate. He was wearing a blue blazer and a straw hat to protect himself from the hot sun and he was supporting himself on a walking stick. He had suffered a heart attack earlier that summer and he still hadn't fully recovered his health. But he showed no sign of that as he stopped at the gate and smiled at the two new arrivals. "Do you live in Cookham?" he asked.

"No, sir. We live in Taplow."

Taplow was another village, further down the river.

"And you made these yourselves?"

"Yes, sir."

"I can bring a couple of muffins up for you, sir," Spencer said.

"No, no. That's all right, Robert." The old man fumbled in his pocket for loose change. "What did

you two young ladies say you were collecting for?"

"It's for our activity centre," Amy repeated.

"We need to repaint our hut," Jasmine explained.

"And we're buying new equipment for the kitchen."

"Well, that's a very good cause." Lord Clifford drew out a shiny pound coin. "I only want one of your cakes, but you can keep the change."

"Thank you!" both the girls chorused.

One of them held up the tray. "You can help yourself to whichever one you want."

Lord Clifford licked his lips, then reached out and took the biggest muffin from the top of the pile. "It smells delicious!" he exclaimed.

He took a bite.

Fifteen minutes later, the plane touched down and taxied towards Terminal 5 before coming to a halt. Alex and Jack unbuckled their seat belts and reached up for their luggage, which included the great ball of Dutch cheese that Jack had insisted on buying in an Amsterdam market. Alex stuffed his exercise books into his backpack. He had school the next day and had been doing his homework during the flight.

At that same moment, Lord Clifford suffered the first seizure that would lead to a major heart attack, followed by death.

Nobody guessed that he had been murdered and that the muffin he had eaten had been made with flour, eggs, milk, butter, chocolate and sodium cyanide, a lethal poison that had begun to attack



his heart and lungs the moment he had taken the first bite. Twenty-four hours later, the two Girl Guides had left the country. Protection Command made no further enquiries and so they did not realize that there was no activity centre in Taplow, no hut to repaint, no kitchen needing equipment.

The organization known as Nightshade had killed Lord Clifford for one simple reason. His death would give them the opportunity to launch a major terrorist attack on the city that was Alex's home. The attack would take place in exactly three weeks' time.