

Snakehead (Alex Rider Adventure)

By Anthony Horowitz

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When Alex Rider crash-lands off the coast of Australia, the Australian Secret Service recruits him to infiltrate one of the ruthless gangs operating across Southeast Asia. Known as snakeheads, the gangs smuggle drugs, weapons, and worst of all, people. Alex accepts the assignment, in part for the chance to work with his godfather and learn more about his parents. What he uncovers, however, is a secret that will make this his darkest and most dangerous mission yet . . . and the knowledge that his old nemesis, Scorpia, is anything but out of his life.

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Snakehead (Alex Rider Adventure) By Anthony Horowitz Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #27393 in Books
- Brand: Speak
- Published on: 2008-09-04
- Released on: 2008-09-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.75" h x .68" w x 5.09" l, .93 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 388 pages

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Editorial Review

Review
This book is full of surprises! Anthony Horowitz has lived up to his reputation and has created another spell bounding plot, which does not allow the reader to put the book down! -- Young Reviewer The Guardian Online

About the Author
Anthony Horowitz's life might have been copied from the pages of Charles Dickens or the Brothers Grimm. Born in 1956 in Stanmore, Middlesex, to a family of wealth and status, Anthony was raised by nannies, surrounded by servants and chauffeurs. His father, a wealthy businessman, was, says Mr. Horowitz, "a fixer for Harold Wilson." What that means exactly is unclear — "My father was a very secretive man," he says— so an aura of suspicion and mystery surrounds both the word and the man. As unlikely as it might seem, Anthony's father, threatened with bankruptcy, withdrew all of his money from Swiss bank accounts in Zurich and deposited it in another account under a false name and then promptly died. His mother searched unsuccessfully for years in attempt to find the money, but it was never found. That too shaped Anthony's view of things. Today he says, "I think the only thing to do with money is spend it." His mother, whom he adored, eccentrically gave him a human skull for his 13th birthday. His grandmother, another Dickensian character, was mean-spirited and malevolent, a destructive force in his life. She was, he says, "a truly evil person", his first and worst arch villain. "My sister and I danced on her grave when she died," he now recalls.

A miserably unhappy and overweight child, Anthony had nowhere to turn for solace. "Family meals," he recalls, "had calories running into the thousands…. I was an astoundingly large, round child…." At the age of eight he was sent off to boarding school, a standard practice of the times and class in which he was raised. While being away from home came as an enormous relief, the school itself, Orley Farm, was a *grand guignol* horror with a headmaster who flogged the boys till they bled. "Once the headmaster told me to stand up in assembly and in front of the whole school said, 'This boy is so stupid he will not be coming to Christmas games tomorrow.' I have never totally recovered." To relieve his misery and that of the other boys, he not unsurprisingly made up tales of astounding revenge and retribution.

So how did an unhappy boy, from a privileged background, metamorphose into the creator of Alex Rider, fourteen-year-old spy for Britain's MI6? Although his childhood permanently damaged him, it also gave him a gift — it provided him with rich source material for his writing career. He found solace in boyhood in the escapism of the James Bond films, he says. He claims that his two sons now watch the James Bond films with the same tremendous enjoyment he did at their age. Bond's glamour translates perfectly to the 14-year-old psyche, the author says. "Bond had his cocktails, the car and the clothes. Kids are just as picky. It's got to be the right Nike trainers (sneakers), the right skateboard. And I genuinely think that 14-year-olds are the coolest people on the planet. It's this wonderful, golden age, just on the cusp of manhood when everything seems possible."

Alex Rider is unwillingly recruited at the age of fourteen to spy for the British secret service, MI6. Forced into situations that most average adults would find terrifying and probably fatal, young Alex rarely loses his cool although at times he doubts his own courage. Using his intelligence and creativity, and aided by non-lethal gadgets dreamed up by MI6's delightfully eccentric, overweight and disheveled Smithers, Alex is able to extricate himself from situations when all seems completely lost. What is perhaps more terrifying than the deeply dangerous missions he finds himself engaged in, is the attitude of his handlers at MI6, who view the boy as nothing more than an expendable asset.

The highly successful Alex Rider novels include *Stormbreaker*, *Point Blank*, *Skeleton Key*, and the recent *Eagle Strike*.

Anthony Horowitz is perhaps the busiest writer in England. He has been writing since the age of eight, and professionally since the age of twenty. He writes in a comfortable shed in his garden for up to ten hours per day. In addition to the highly successful Alex Rider books, he has also written episodes of several popular TV crime series, including *Poirot, Murder in Mind, Midsomer Murders and Murder Most Horrid*. He has written a television series *Foyle's War*, which recently aired in the United States, and he has written the libretto of a Broadway musical adapted from Dr. Seuss's book, *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T.* His film script *The Gathering* has just finished production. And…oh yes…there are more Alex Rider novels in the works. Anthony has also written the *Diamond Brothers* series.

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Alex Rider would never forget the moment of impact, the first shock as the parachute opened and the second—more jolting still—as the module that had carried him back from outer space crashed into the sea. Was it his imagination, or was there steam rising up all around him? Maybe it was sea spray. It didn't matter. He was back. That was all he cared about. He had made it. He was still alive.

He was still lying on his back, crammed into the tiny space with his knees tucked into his chest. Half closing his eyes, Alex experienced a moment of extraordinary stillness. He was completely still. His fists were clenched. He wasn't breathing. Was it really true? Already he found it impossible to believe that the events that had led to his journey into outer space had really taken place. He tried to imagine himself hurtling around the earth at seventeen and a half thousand miles an hour. It couldn't have happened. It had surely all been part of some incredible dream.

Slowly he forced himself to unwind. He lifted an arm. It rose normally. He could feel the muscle connecting. Just minutes before he had been in zero gravity. But as he rested, trying to collect his thoughts, he realized that once again his body belonged to him.

Alex wasn't sure how long he was left on his own, floating on the water somewhere . . . it could have been anywhere in the world. But when things happened, they did so very quickly. First there was the hammering of helicopter blades. Then the whoop of some sort of siren. He could see very little out the window—just the rise and fall of the ocean—but suddenly a man was there, a scuba diver, a palm slamming against the glass. A few seconds later, the capsule was opened from outside. Fresh air came rushing in, and to Alex it smelled delicious. At the same time, a man loomed over him, his body wrapped in neoprene, his eyes behind a mask.

"Are you okay?"

Alex could hardly make out the words, there was so much noise outside. Did the diver have an American accent? "I'm fine," he managed to shout back. But it wasn't true. He was beginning to feel sick. There was a shooting pain behind his eyes.

"Don't worry! We'll soon have you out of there . . ."

It took them a while. Alex had only been in space a short time, but he'd never had any physical training for it, and now his muscles were turning against him, reluctant to start pulling their own weight. He had to be manhandled out of the capsule, into the blinding sun of a Pacific afternoon. Everything was chaotic. There was a helicopter overhead, the blades beating at the ocean, forming patterns that rippled and vibrated. Alex turned his head and saw—impossibly—an aircraft carrier, as big as a mountain, looming out of the water less

than a quarter of a mile away. It was flying the Stars and Stripes. So he had been right about the diver. He must have landed somewhere off the coast of America.

There were two more divers in the water, bobbing up and down next to the capsule, and Alex could see a third man leaning out of the helicopter directly above him. He knew what was going to happen, and he didn't resist. First a loop of cable was passed around his chest and connected. He felt it tighten under his arms. And then he was rising into the air, still in his space suit, dangling like a silver puppet as he was winched up.

And already they knew. He had glimpsed it in the eyes of the diver who had spoken to him. The disbelief. These men—the helicopter, the aircraft carrier—had been rushed out to rendezvous with a module that had just reentered the earth's atmosphere. And inside, they had found a boy. A fourteen-year-old had just plummeted a hundred miles from outer space. These men would be sworn to secrecy, of course. MI6 would see to that. They would never talk about what had happened. Nor would they forget it.

There was a medical officer waiting for him on board the USS Kitty Hawk—which was the name of the ship that had been diverted to pick him up. His name was Josh Cook, and he was forty years old, black with wire-frame glasses and a pleasant, soft-spoken manner. He helped Alex out of the space suit and stayed in the room when Alex finally did throw up. It turned out that he'd dealt with astronauts before.

"They're all sick when they come down," he explained. "It goes with the territory. Or maybe I should say terra firma. That's Latin for 'down to earth.' You'll be fine by the morning."

"Where am I?" Alex asked.

"You're about ninety miles off the coast of Australia. We were on a training exercise when we got a red alert that you were on your way down."

"So what happens now?"

"Now you have a shower and get some sleep. You're in luck. We've got a mattress made out of memory foam. It was actually developed by NASA. It'll give your muscles a chance to get used to being back in full gravity."

Alex had been given a private cabin in the medical department of the Kitty Hawk—in fact, a fully equipped "hospital at sea" with sixty-five beds, an operating room, a pharmacy, and everything else that 5,500 sailors might need. It wasn't huge, but he suspected that nobody else on the Kitty Hawk would have this much space. Cook went over to the corner and pulled back a plastic curtain to reveal a shower cubicle.

"You may find it difficult to walk," he explained. "You're going to be unsteady on your feet for at least twenty-four hours. If you like, I can wait in the room until you've showered."

"I'll be okay," Alex said.

"All right." Cook smiled and opened the main door. But before he left, he looked back at Alex. "You know—every man and woman on this ship is talking about you," he said. "There are a whole pile of questions I'd like to ask you, but I'm under strict orders from the captain to keep my mouth shut. Even so, I want you to know that I've been at sea for a long, long time and I've never encountered anything like this. A kid in outer space!" He nodded one last time. "I hope you have a good rest. There's a call button beside the bed if there's anything you need."

Cook left.

It took Alex ten minutes to get into the shower. He had completely lost his sense of balance, and the roll of the ship didn't help. He turned the temperature up as high as he could bear and stood under the steaming water, enjoying the rush of it over his shoulders and through his hair. Then he dried himself and got into bed. The memory foam was only a couple of inches thick, but it seemed to mold itself to the shape of his body exactly. He fell almost instantly into a deep but troubled sleep.

He didn't dream about the Ark Angel space station or his knife fight with Kaspar, the bald ecoterrorist who had been determined to kill him even though it was clear that all was lost. Nor did he dream about Nikolei Drevin, the billionaire who had been behind it all.

But it did seem to him that, sometime in the middle of the night, he heard the whisper of voices that he didn't recognize but that, somehow, he still knew. Old friends. Or old enemies. It didn't matter which because he couldn't make out what they were saying, and anyway, a moment later they were swept away down the dark river of his sleep.

Perhaps it was a premonition.

Because three weeks before, seven men had met in a room in London to discuss an operation that would make them many millions of dollars and would change the shape of the world. And although Alex had never met any of them, he certainly knew them.

Scorpia was back again.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lacey Clements:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity intended for spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open or even read a book eligible Snakehead (Alex Rider Adventure)? Maybe it is for being best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have different opinion?

Mildred Miller:

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Carlie Manson:

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