

Just one hour left

Anthony Horowitz

<http://www.alexrideradventures.com/>

Stormbreaker is the first of seven books about Alex Rider, superspy. Alex is a spy with a difference – he is only 14 years old in Stormbreaker, when he is recruited into MI6. In every story TIME matters – Alex is a teenage James Bond who always succeeds at the very last second.

In Stormbreaker, (the film version was released in 2006) Alex is recruited into MI6 to investigate a Mr. Herod Sayle who is giving a revolutionary Stormbreaker computer to every secondary school in the UK. Mr. Sayle, originally from Beirut, is being hailed as a philanthropist - it helps that he went to school with the current Prime Minister – but MI6 are very suspicious. The computers are not what they seem.

Alex's uncle was on to something important at the Sayle plant where the computers are being assembled, but Alex's uncle is now dead, and Alex is forced to take over. The problem is time – there are only two weeks before 1st April at 12 noon when the Prime Minister is due to click on the master control in the East Hall of the Science Museum in London. At that moment all the Stormbreaker computers in every secondary school in Britain will go on-line, and ...

Of course, we do not want to reveal the plot here. Enough to tell you that Alex goes through a very intensive SAS training. And he is given spy gadgets to help him – a yo-yo where the string can lift weights of up to one hundred kilograms; a small tube of ZIT-CLEAN, FOR HEALTHIER SKIN, where the cream will do nothing for teenage spots but will burn through any metal; and a Nintendo Game Boy Colour, which can be used as a fax/photocopier, a microphone, a bug finder, x-ray device and smoke bomb.

Of course, too, Alex discovers why the Stormbreaker is such a dangerous computer – you'll have to read the book to find out how. We pick the story up towards the end, when every second counts if Alex is to save Britain from the evil Mr. Sayle!

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An alarm had gone off. He only heard it now, as sound and vision came back to him. The screaming of the siren shook him out of his dazed state. What time was it? Almost eleven o'clock. At least his watch was still working. But he was in Cornwall, at least a five-hour drive from London, and with the alarms sounding, the armed guards and the razor wire, he'd never make it out of the complex. Find a telephone? No. Vole had probably been telling the truth when she'd said they were blocked. And anyway, how could he get in touch with Alan Blunt or Mrs. Jones at this late stage? They'd already be at the Science Museum.

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Outside, over the din of the alarm, Alex heard another sound. The splutter and roar of a propeller. He went over to the nearest window and looked out. Sure enough, the cargo plane that had been there when he arrived was preparing to take off. If Alex was going to reach the Science Museum in London in the fifty-nine minutes left to him, he had to be on it.

Alex gets on board the cargo plane – with the help of his yo-yo and a Jeep. Using a gun which he just happens to have picked up, Alex forces the pilot - the terrible Mr. Grin – to fly to London. 'We're going to the Science Museum in South Kensington. It can't take us more than half an hour to get there. And if you think about trying to trick me, I'll put a bullet in you.'

The minutes tick by. 12 o'clock gets closer and closer.

London appeared. Alex saw it with a clenched stomach, looking out through the open door of the aircraft. He's had fifty minutes to think about what he had to do. Fifty minutes while the plane droned over Cornwall and Devon, then Somerset and the Salisbury Plains before reaching the North Downs and flying towards Windsor and London.

If he could have thought of any other way to reach the Science Museum in the seven minutes he had left, he would have taken it. There was no other way. He knew that. So he had jumped.

Once he was over the threshold, it wasn't so bad. There was a moment of dizzying confusion as the wind hit him once again. He closed his eyes and forced himself to count to three. Pull too early and the parachute might snag on the plane's tail. Even so, his hand was clenched and he had barely muttered the word "three" before he was pulling with all his strength. The parachute blossomed open above him and he was jerked upwards, the harness cutting into his armpits and sides.

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The next few minutes are taken up getting rid of Mr. Grin and the cargo plane – that Game Boy turned out to be really useful!

Alex looked at his watch. Three minutes to twelve. He was still a thousand feet in the air and unless he landed on the very doorstep of the Science Museum, he wasn't going to make it. Grabbing hold of the cords, using them to steer himself, he tried to work out the fastest way down.

Inside the Science Museum, the Prime Minister is ready to click.

Herod Sayle pointed at a table slightly to one side of the podium. On the table was a Stormbreaker and next to it, a mouse. "This is the master control," he said. "Click on the mouse and all the computers will come on-line."

"Right." The Prime Minister lifted his finger and adjusted his position so that the cameras could get his best profile. Somewhere outside the museum, a clock began to strike.

Alex heard the clock from about three hundred feet, with the roof of the Science Museum rushing towards him.

He had seen the building just after the plane had crashed. It hadn't been easy finding it, with the city spread out like a three-dimensional map right underneath him. The whole city had become a fantastic jigsaw puzzle and he knew he only had seconds to piece it together.

And there it was. Alex pulled the parachute, guiding himself towards it. Somehow he managed to manoeuvre himself over the museum. But it was only as he fell the last two hundred feet, as he heard the clock strike twelve, that he realized two things. He was falling much too fast. And he had missed the flat roof.

Alex crashed into the curved roof feet-first. The roof shattered. With a yell, Alex smashed through the glass. At last his parachute caught on a beam. He jerked to a halt, swinging in mid-air inside the East Hall.

And how does Alex stop that finger clicking on the mouse? You'll have to read the book to find the answer to that one - we leave Alex here, hanging above the action.

Anthony Horowitz 2000 Extracts from "Stormbreaker" pages 211, 212-213, 214-215, 216-217, 219, 220-221

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Stormbreaker Review

93 minutes, UK/USA (2006), PG

Given Anthony Horowitz's ability to entertain adults as ably as children, you might expect *Stormbreaker* to have the crossover appeal of, say, a Pixar animation. In fact, while few grown-ups will find the film dull, this is a picture aimed squarely at kids. The Beckham-esque Alex Pettyfer was almost certainly cast to capture the attention of the younger generation. A little bland perhaps, he nevertheless possesses the requisite Bond appeal in that it's easy to imagine young boys wanting to be him and young girls wanting to hold hands with him or whatever it is young people do these days.

With its decent action scenes and depiction of London as a stunning international city, *Stormbreaker* might not blow adult minds but it ought to appeal to every child's imagination. Of course, execs and children alike will be hoping the film is a sequel procreator along **Harry Potter** lines. And while there's the odd problem to be ironed out (hopefully Pettyfer will grow into the role the way Daniel Radcliffe has gradually become Hogwarts' head-boy), there's enough here to suggest that this teen agent will return to thrill us again.

Verdict: At last, a 007 for the sevens to 17-year olds.

Extracts from: <http://www.channel4.com/>

Anthony Horowitz himself has had a very unusual life. The inspiration for his books is there in his background. Here is the beginning of his bio from his own website:

<http://www.anthonhorowitz.com/>

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.