

Introduction

I'm often asked which is my favourite book and, outside the Alex Rider series, this is probably it.

The Switch was one of the last books that were directly inspired by my own childhood – the others were *Groosham Grange* and *Granny*. All three of them have a lot of the same ingredients: rich parents, unhappy heroes, peculiar nannies, horrible schools and lots of bizarre jokes.

Spurling, the chauffeur in the book, is based on a rather dangerous-looking man called Bob who used to drive my father around. Mitzy,

The Switch

the housekeeper, is a jokey version of my own nanny whose name was Miss FitzGerald but who was always called Fitzy. My mother had a really savage and unpleasant German Shepherd called Major. He appears here as Vicious. And Snatchmore Hall, though exaggerated, is based on the house where I was brought up – White Friars in Stanmore.

I suppose that makes Tad Spencer, whose underpants snap during the headmaster's speech, a version of ... me! Re-reading the book, I notice that he has black hair and brown eyes. He eats too much. He plays Scrabble with his mother. It's all horribly accurate and if I hadn't written it myself, I'd sue.

But then the story was inspired by a feeling that I often had when I was about eleven years old. Stuck in the misery of north London's very own Guantanamo Bay – a particularly nasty

Introduction

boarding school in north London – I often used to dream of running away and there were many, many moments when I would wish I was someone else.

This is what happens to Tad at the start of the story. The only difference is that – through a mechanism that is never properly explained – in his case it actually happens.

The Switch is a body-swap book and I should say at once that it's not an entirely original idea. There was a famous film when I was young called *Vice Versa* in which a father swaps bodies with his son ... it was later remade as *Freaky Friday*. People have swapped bodies in books, on television and even in graphic novels.

I'd wanted to do a body-swap story for a long time but I knew I couldn't write one until I came up with a completely original angle. And then one day, I happened to pass one of those trendy

The Switch

“green” cosmetic shops – selling soaps, perfumes, candles and all the rest of it – and I noticed a sign in the window. **NONE OF OUR PRODUCTS ARE TESTED ON ANIMALS.** At that moment, the whole rest of the book popped into my head and I knew I had to sit down and write it.

The reason why I like the book so much, and what makes it different from anything I'd written before, is the character of the two boys – Tad Spencer and Bob Snarby. I love everything about Bob from his dishonesty and his unhygienic lifestyle to his completely revolting parents ... there are very few parents in my books but Eric and Doll strike me as a perfect couple and I was determined not to kill them off in the end. One of the things you may notice in this book is that all the good people are villains and all the villains are actually quite nice – which I suppose is also part of the “switch”.

Introduction

But Tad and Bob are harder to pin down. Both of them change during the story and both of them discover that there are huge advantages to not being themselves. In a strange way, I don't think I could have ever created Alex Rider without writing *The Switch* first. Because as the story progresses, and despite all the fantastic things, the two boys become more and more real. Look at the scene in Chapter 8 when they finally meet. I think they're my first believable heroes and the last chapter – "Together" – has a real sadness and seriousness about it. It suggested to me that I could write a completely new, more emotional book if I wanted to. And the one that I wrote next was *Stormbreaker*.

It's strange to think how much has happened since then. But as I began by saying, it's still one of my favourites and I'm very glad that you've bought it. At least, I assume that you've

The Switch

bought it. If you're just reading this in the shop, it'll cost you less than a packet of Eric Snarby's cigarettes and it won't give you bad breath or cancer – so give it a try!

Anthony Horowitz





Beautiful World

The white Rolls Royce made no sound as it sped along the twisting country road. It was the middle of summer and the grass was high, speckled with wild poppies and daisies. Sunlight danced in the air. But the single passenger in the back of the car saw none of it. His head was buried in a book: *My 100 Favourite Equations*. As he flicked a page, he popped another cherry marzipan chocolate into his mouth, the fourteenth he had eaten since Ipswich. The automatic window slid open and yet another chocolate wrapper was whipped away by the wind. It twisted briefly in the air,

The Switch

then fell. By the time it hit the ground, the Rolls was already out of sight. And Thomas Arnold David Spencer was a little nearer home.

Thomas Arnold David – Tad for short – was thirteen years old, dressed in grey trousers that were a little too tight for him, a striped tie and blue blazer. He had short black hair, rather too neatly combed, and deep brown eyes. He was returning home from Beton College on this, the first day of the summer holidays. It was typical of Tad that he should have started his homework already. Tad loved homework. He was only sorry he hadn't been given more.

The Rolls Royce paused in front of a set of wrought-iron gates. There was a click and the gates began to open automatically. At the same time, a video camera set on a high brick wall swivelled round to watch the new arrival with a blank, hostile eye. Beyond the gates, a

long drive stretched out for almost half a mile between lawns that had been rolled perfectly flat. Two swans circled on a glistening pond, watching the Rolls as it continued forward. It passed a rose garden, a vegetable garden, a croquet lawn, a tennis court and a heated swimming pool. At last it stopped in front of the fantastic pile that was Snatchmore Hall, home of the Spencer family. Tad had arrived.

The chauffeur, a large, ugly man with hooded eyes, crumpled cheeks and a small, snub nose, got out of the car and held the door open for Tad. "Glad to be home, Master Spencer?"

"Yes, thank you, Spurling." Tad's voice was flat, almost emotionless. "Rather."

"I'll take your cases to your room, Master Spencer."

"Thank you, Spurling. Just leave them on the bed."

The Switch

Tad went over to the swimming pool, where a bored-looking woman was lying on a sun-lounger, gazing at herself intently in a small mirror. This was his mother, Lady Geranium Spencer.

“Good afternoon, Mother,” Tad said. He knew not to kiss her. It would have ruined her make-up.

“Oh hello, dear.” His mother sighed. “Is it the holidays already?”

“Yes.”

“Oh. I thought it was next week. What do you think of the nose?”

“It’s jolly good, Mother. They’ve moved it a little, haven’t they?”

“Yes. Just a teensy-weensy bit to the left.” Lady Spencer had visited no fewer than six plastic surgeons that summer and each one of them had operated on her nose, trying to give her the

exact look she required. Now she was sure she had at last got it right. The only trouble was that she wasn't allowed to sneeze until Christmas. "How was school, darling?" she asked, putting the mirror away.

"It was fine, thank you, Mother. I came first in French, English, Chemistry, Maths and Latin. Second in Ancient Greek and Geography. Third in..."

"Ah! Here's Mitzy with the tea!" his mother interrupted, stifling a yawn. "Just what I fancied. A teensy-weensy tea."

The front door of the house had opened and a trolley, piled high with cakes and sandwiches, had appeared, seemingly moving by itself. As it drew closer, however, a tiny woman could be seen behind it, wearing a black dress with a white apron. This was Mitzy, the family's servant for the past forty years.

The Switch

“Hello, Master Tad!” she gurgled breathlessly as she heaved the trolley to a halt. It was so heavy it had left deep tyre-tracks across the lawn.

“Hello, Mitzy.” Tad smiled at her. “How are you?”

“I can’t complain, Master Tad.”

“And Bitzy?” This was Mitzy’s husband. His real name was Ernest but he had been given his nickname after he’d been blown to pieces by a faulty gas main.

“He’s still in hospital.” Mitzy sighed. “I’m seeing him on Sunday.”

“Well, do give him my regards,” Tad said cheerfully, helping himself to a smoked salmon roll.

Mitzy limped back to the house while Tad ate. Lady Spencer cast a critical eye at her son. “Have you put on weight?” she asked.

“Just a little, Mumsy. I’m afraid you’re going to have to buy me a completely new uniform for next term. This one’s much too tight.”

“What a bore! That’s the third this year.”

“I know. The elastic on my underpants snapped during the headmaster’s speech. It was rather embarrassing...”

Just then there was a loud bark and a dog bounded across the lawn towards Tad and his mother. It was a Dalmatian – you could easily tell that from its black and white coat – but it was like no Dalmatian you had ever seen.

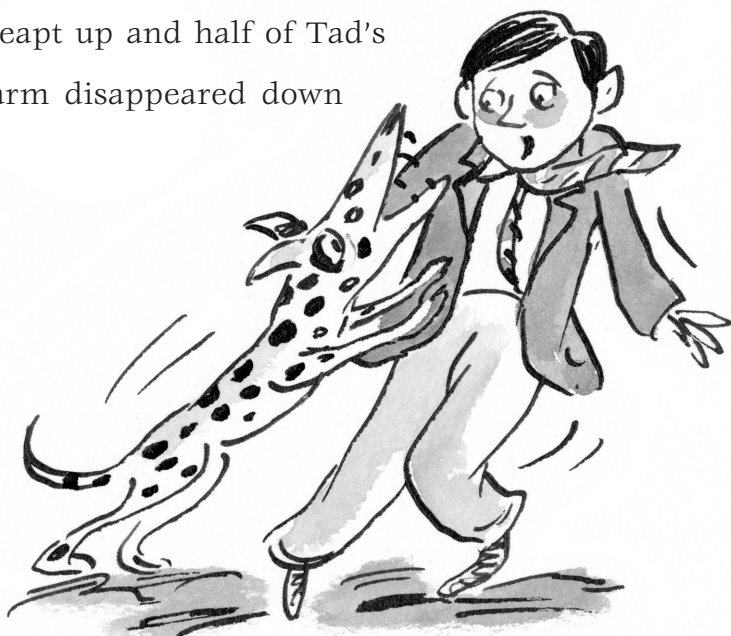
For a start it was huge. Its teeth were incredibly sharp and its mouth, instead of grinning in the friendly way ordinary Dalmatians do, was twisted in an ugly frown. The reason for all this was that the Spencers had taken the unfortunate dog to a vet who had turned it into a killing machine, filing down both its teeth and its

The Switch

claws until they were needle-sharp. The last burglar who had tried to break in had needed 107 stitches when Vicious had finished with him. In the end the police surgeon had run out of thread and had been forced to use glue.

But Vicious recognized Tad. Panting and whimpering, the dog sat down and raised a paw, its eyes fixed on the tea trolley.

“Hello, Vicious. How are you?” Tad reached out with an éclair. The dog leapt up and half of Tad’s arm disappeared down



its throat as Vicious sucked the éclair free.

“You spoil that dog,” his mother remarked.

After tea, Tad went up to his room, taking the elevator to the third floor. Spurling had carried his cases up and Mrs O’Blimey, the Irish housekeeper, had already unpacked them. Tad sat down on his four-poster bed and looked around him contentedly. Everything was where it should be. There were his two computers and fourteen shelves of computer games. There was his HD television plugged into his own satellite system. His favourite books (Dickens and Shakespeare) bound in leather and gold, stretched out in a long line over his butterfly collection, his interactive CD system and his tank of rare tropical fish. Then there were nine wardrobes containing his clothes and next to them a door leading into his private bathroom, sauna and Jacuzzi.

The Switch

Tad stretched out his arms and smiled. He had the whole summer holiday to look forward to. As well as the country house in Suffolk, there was the villa in the South of France, the penthouse in New York and the mews house in Knightsbridge, just round the corner from Harrods. He unbuttoned his jacket and took it off, letting it fall to the floor. Mrs O'Blimey could pick it up later. It was time for dinner. And soon his father would be home.

In fact Sir Hubert Spencer didn't get in until after nine o'clock. He was a large, imposing man with wavy silver hair and purple blotches in his cheeks, nose and hands. He was dressed, as always, in a plain black suit cut from the very finest material. As he strode into the room and sat down he pulled out an antique pocket watch and glanced at the face.

"Good evening, Tad," he said. "Good to


see you. Now. I can give you nine and a half minutes...”

“Gosh! Thank you, Father.”

Tad was delighted. He knew that his Father was a busy man. In fact, business ruled his life. Ten years ago, Sir Hubert Spencer had set up a chain of shops that now stretched across England, Europe and America. The shops were called simply “Beautiful World” and sold soaps, shampoos, body lotions, sun creams, vitamins, minerals, herbs and spices ... everything to make you feel beautiful inside and out. What made these shops special, however, was that the ingredients for many of the products came from the Third World – yak’s milk from the mountain villages of Tibet, for example, or crushed orchids from the tropical rain forests of Sumatra. And all the shops carried a notice in large letters in the window:

**NONE OF OUR PRODUCTS
ARE TESTED ON ANIMALS**

Sir Hubert had realized that people not only wanted to look good, they wanted to feel good too. And the better they felt, the more they would spend and the richer he would become.

A small, stylized illustration of a stack of coins, with a few coins scattered around the base, rendered in a sketchy, grey-toned style.

Sir Hubert never stopped. He was always developing new products, finding new ingredients, dreaming up new advertising ideas, selling more products. It was said that while he was being knighted by the queen, two years before, he had managed to sell her ten gallons of face-cream and a lifetime's supply of Japanese seaweed shampoo. He had appeared on the front page of all the newspapers after that. Because, despite his great wealth, Sir Hubert was very popular. **"GOOD OLD SIR HUBERT!"** people would shout out if they saw him in the street.

“HE MAY BE STINKING RICH, BUT HE’S ALL RIGHT.”

The reason for this popularity – and also for his knighthood – was his charity work. At about the same time that he had set up Beautiful World he had started a charity called ACID. This stood for *The Association for Children in Distress* and was based in London. ACID aimed to help all the young people who had run away or been abandoned in the city, giving them shelter and providing them with food or clothes. Tad himself had donated two pairs of socks and a Mars bar to the charity. He was very proud of his father and dreamed of the day when, maybe, he would be knighted too.

“Sorry I’m late,” Sir Hubert announced now as he sat himself down in his favourite armchair beside the fire with Vicious curled up at his feet. “We’ve got problems with our new Peruvian

The Switch

cocoa-leaf bubble bath. Not enough bubbles. We may have to do more tests..." He turned to Spurling, who was standing beside him. "Have you poured me a brandy, Spurling?"

"Yes, Sir Hubert."

"Have you warmed it for me?"

"Yes, Sir Hubert."

"Well, you can drink it for me too. I haven't got time."

"Certainly, Sir Hubert." Taking the glass, the chauffeur bowed and left the room.

Sir Hubert turned to Tad, who was playing Scrabble with Lady Spencer. Tad was a little annoyed. He had a seven-letter word but unfortunately it was in Ancient Greek. "So, Tad," he exclaimed. "How was school?"

"Jolly good, Father. I came first in French, English, Chemistry, Maths and Latin. Second in..."

"That's the spirit!" Sir Hubert interrupted. "Now. What have you got planned for the summer holiday?"

"Well, I was thinking about going on safari in Africa, Father."

"Didn't you do that last holidays?"

"Yes. But it was rather fun. One of the guides got eaten by a tiger. I got some great photos."

"I thought you wanted to go to the Red Sea."

"We could do that afterwards, Father."

"Oh – all right." Sir Hubert turned to his wife. "You'd better take the boy to Harrods and get him some tropical clothes," he said. "Oh – and some scuba-diving lessons."

"And there is one other thing, Father."

"What's that, Tad?" There was a jangling sound from Sir Hubert's top pocket and he pulled out one of his mobile phones. "Could you hold the line, please," he said. "I'll be with

The Switch

you in ninety-three seconds.”

Tad took a deep breath. “Rupert said he’d come up this week. You know – he’s my best friend. And we thought we might go to Maple Towers together.”

“Maple Towers?”

“It’s that new theme park that’s just opened. It’s got an amazing new ride – the Monster. Apparently it’s almost impossible to go on it without being sick...”

“A theme park?” Sir Hubert considered, then shook his head. “No. I don’t think so.”

“**WHAT?**” Tad stared at his father. Perhaps unsurprisingly “no” was his least favourite word.

“No, Tad. These theme parks seem very vulgar to me. Why don’t you go horse-racing at Ascot?”

“I’ll do that too, Father.”

“What about flying lessons? You’ve hardly touched that two-seater plane I bought you...”

“I will, Father, but...”

“No. I don’t want you going on those rides. They’re dangerous and they’re noisy. And all those people! You’re a sensitive boy, Tad. I’m sure they’re not good for you.”

“BUT, FATHER! MOTHER...!”

“I have to agree with your father,” Lady Spencer said. She looked at her Scrabble letters which she had been studying for the past ten minutes. “Is Zimpy a word?” she asked.

Tad was in a bad mood when he went to bed. Dressed in his brand new silk pyjamas, he flicked off the light and slid himself between the crisply laundered Irish linen sheets. The trouble was that he was a boy who had everything. And he was used to having everything. He expected it.

The Switch

"It's not fair," he muttered. His head sank back into his goose-feather pillow. Moonlight slid across the wall and onto his pale, scowling face. "Why can't I go to the theme park? Why can't I do what I want to do?"

Suddenly Snatchmore Hall seemed like a prison to him. His parents, his great wealth, his school and his surroundings were just the shackles that bound him and he wanted none of it.

"I wish I was somebody else," he muttered to himself.

And 127 million light years away, a star that had been burning white suddenly glowed green, just for a few seconds, before burning white again.

But Thomas Arnold David Spencer hadn't seen it. He was already asleep.