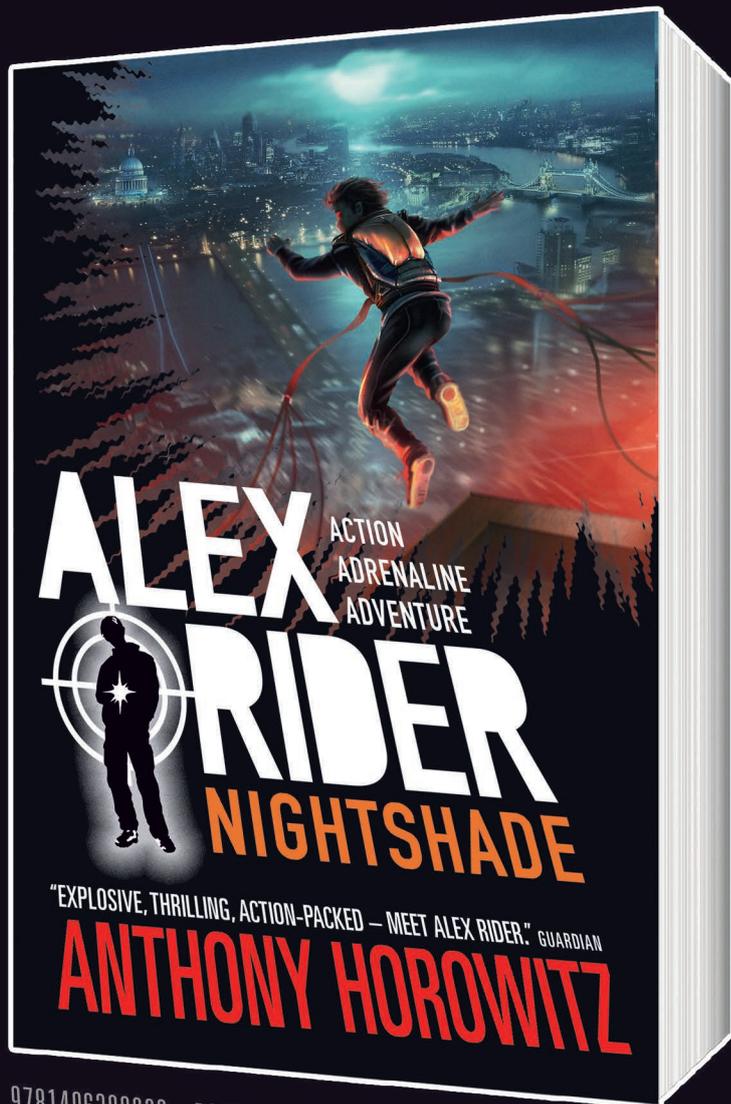


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# DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR *NIGHTSHADE*

## ANTHONY HOROWITZ

### ABOUT THE BOOK

In *Nightshade*, the latest action-packed instalment from the hugely popular Alex Rider series, Horowitz has created an edge-of-the-seat thriller. Alex, back at school and desperately hoping his recent exploits as a spy and secret agent are behind him, discovers that a terrorist attack is being planned in London. What's worse, the only person who might be able to uncover the details of the attack, and save the lives of thousands of innocent people, is Alex himself. Following the trail across countries and continents, Alex must race against the clock to prevent disaster, pitted against his deadliest enemies yet.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthony Horowitz is the author of the number one bestselling Alex Rider books and the *Power of Five* series. He enjoys huge international acclaim as a writer for both children and adults. After the success of his first James Bond novel, *Trigger Mortis*, he was invited back by the Ian Fleming Estate to write a second, *Forever and a Day*. His latest crime novel, *The Word is Murder*, introducing Detective Daniel Hawthorne, was a bestseller. Anthony has won numerous awards, including the Bookseller Association/Nielsen Author of the Year Award, the Children's Book of the Year Award at the British Book Awards, and the Red House Children's Book Award. In 2014 Anthony was awarded an OBE for Services to Literature. He has also created and written many major television series, including *Collision*, *New Blood* and the BAFTA-winning *Foyle's War*. The bestselling Alex Rider adventures are currently being adapted for television.

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

*Nightshade* is the thirteenth book in the bestselling Alex Rider series. Set across a backdrop of abduction, child spies and terrorist attacks, it is full of intricate and elaborate set pieces, daring missions, incredible action, and Horowitz's eye for detail and high-energy pace. Many group members might have read other books in the series, seen the 2006 film, *Stormbreaker* or the 2020 TV series, *Alex Rider*. It would be worth agreeing with the group up-front on what everyone is happy with regarding spoilers or details from any other books or these adaptations.

Alongside the action sequences and adventure, there are elements of this novel that deal with serious global issues – terrorism, child abduction and child spies. Alex is very reluctant to go back into the world of espionage, and elements of coercion may ring true to group members' lived experience, in other ways. To compare the book with the realities of some of the themes within it, look at:

<https://justforkidslaw.org/what-we-do/fighting-change/strategic-litigation/children-spies>

<https://www.justsecurity.org/59759/child-spies-uk/>

<https://theirworld.org/explainers/child-soldiers>

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Getting started:

Ask the group what they thought of *Nightshade*. Who enjoyed it? What did they like? Would anyone like to expand on their answer? Without giving away spoilers to other Alex Rider stories, can anyone explain how the book compared to others in the series?

### 1. Action

'The boy sprang to his feet... quite literally.' - p. 55

Consider one of the action sequences from the book. What makes it so exciting to read? What does Horowitz do as a writer to make it more interesting and fast-paced? It may be worth picking out a particularly exciting passage in advance, such as the one on pages 53-57, or pages 211-217.

### 2. Suspense

'The men had been waiting for him at school and when they failed, they had come here. But who were they and what did they want? And where was Jack?' - p. 96

How does Horowitz build suspense as the novel goes along? When does the reader find out key information? What effect does it have, finding out new information, or trying to work out the plot twists as Alex has to work them out himself?

### 3. Adaptation

'But a cinema? Alex was certainly in no mood for a film.' - p. 227

Check who has seen either the film or television series based on Alex Rider. Why do group members think these adaptations have been made? Is this book suitable for adapting – if so, why is that? Can anyone in the group think of similar types of stories to compare Alex Rider to? Why are they similar? Are there adaptations of these stories too?

### 4. Number Nine

“‘Freddy is not my name... you have to call me Number Nine.’” - p. 190

Think about the character Freddy Grey, or Number Nine. Why is he given a number, instead of a name? What effect does this have on the character? What about the other 'Numbers'? The Nightshade organisation pretends to be religious, but away from the numbers they act very differently – why is this?

### 5. Landmarks and landscapes

'...in the distance, a looming shadow that he knew was the Rock of Gibraltar.' - p. 135

Lots of recognisable landscapes, buildings and places are included in the novel, from the Rock of Gibraltar, to the island of Crete, to famous landmarks in London, like St Paul's Cathedral and the Shard. Why do members of the group think Horowitz uses these places? What effect does it have on the reader? Have any group members seen any of these places? Compare responses with members who perhaps haven't seen them – could they still imagine them? You might like to prepare some images in advance to show the group, if you have access to a smart screen or a computer, or can print them out.

### 6. Real-life reflections

“‘Are you seriously telling me that the British government quite cheerfully went ahead and employed a child who wasn't even old enough to vote?’” - p. 30

Before the session, look through the websites linked above, and pull out some interesting facts and information from them, that you can share with the group. Start by asking what members of the group know already – are there really child spies in the world? If so, what

are they like? How are they recruited? Share some of the information with the group as a whole and discuss how this makes them feel. What are the realities of child soldiers and child spies? How do they compare with Alex Rider? Does this help members understand why Alex is so reluctant to go back to work for MI6 Special Operations?

**7. What is in a name?**

'The organization known as Nightshade had killed Lord Clifford for one simple reason.' - p. 18

Why is the villainous organisation in the novel called Nightshade? What does the word 'nightshade' mean? What ideas does it suggest to the reader? Think about some of the other names of organisations, missions or characters in the book, or in previous books, e.g., Scorpia, Point Blanc, Steel Claw, Julius Grief, Mr Someone. What effects do these names have, and why has Horowitz chosen them?

**8. To be a spy...**

'He could not have imagined that he was being trained for a future he would never have chosen for himself' - p. 89

What skills does Alex need to succeed in the novel? How do members of the group think they would get on as a government agent? What would be the hardest part of the job? The best part? Would anyone actually want to be a spy?