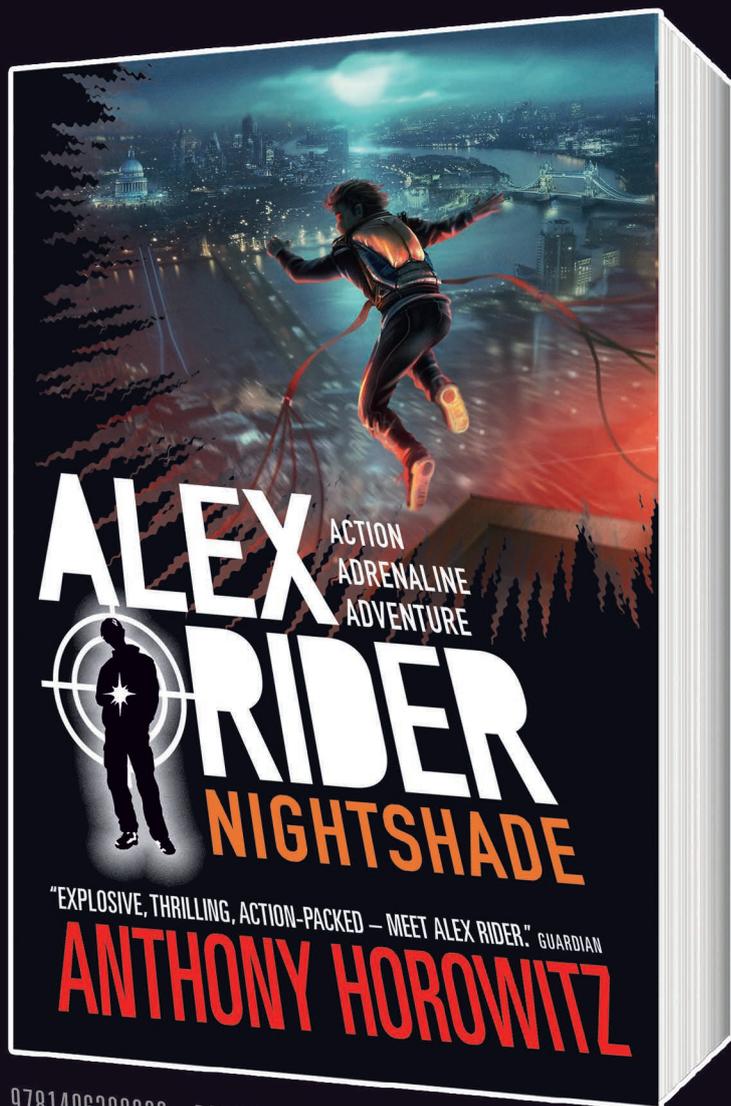


TEACHERS'
NOTES

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TEACHING NOTES FOR *NIGHTSHADE*

ANTHONY HOROWITZ

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

The notes and text are most suitable for readers in Upper Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3

BEFORE YOU START:

- This is the thirteenth title in a well-established series, which has been adapted for film and recently for TV, so children may already be familiar with Alex Rider. Before beginning the series of activities, ask the children if they have read any of the Alex Rider series of novels, seen the 2006 *Stormbreaker* film or the *Alex Rider* TV series, which premiered on Amazon Prime in 2020. If they have experience of the world of Alex Rider, what expectations do they have of this book based on this?
- As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal or give children individual reading journals to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. The children could also be asked to consider the writer's use of language and how he creates a particular effect or image at opportune points throughout the text.
- The length of the book means that you will need to consider how you wish children to engage with the text. The sessions below propose a blend of reading aloud by the adult, re-reading by the adult or the children and discussion of key passages; pupils reading sections of the text independently between sessions, depending on their experience; revisiting specific passages and episodes and engaging in specific activities to deepen response and comprehension.

COVER AND PROLOGUE (PAGES 11 TO 18)

- Begin by sharing the cover, and asking children to consider it carefully, reading what messages it might contain about the book they are about to read. Ask the children to make predictions of what the story could be about and to justify their responses, drawing out any connections they may have made to other stories. Record the children's responses and return to these as you read the book, comparing the children's initial thoughts to how the story actually unfolds.
- Encourage them to look in detail at all aspects of the cover, the layout and typography as well as the illustration:
 - *Who do you think this character could be? What do you think he is doing and why? What clues do you get from their body language, the clothes and equipment they are wearing?*
 - *Where do you think he is standing, what is the cityscape he is looking over? What else do you notice about the setting? Where and when do you think the story might be set? What leads you to think this? Does the cover make you want to read the story? Why? Why not?*
 - *What can you say about the layout and appearance of the cover, the palette and photorealistic style, the typeface used for the title Alex Rider: Nightshade, the cross hairs on the logo of the 'Boy with Torch™'? Do you know the name Alex Rider, having perhaps read other titles in the series or seen the film or TV adaptation? Have you heard of the author*

Anthony Horowitz, or possibly read other stories by him? What does your knowledge of Alex Rider or experience of Anthony Horowitz's other books lead you to expect here?

- Consider the Contents page, and reflect on the section and chapter titles:
 - *Do you recognise the names of the different 'Parts' that Anthony Horowitz has divided the book into: 'Genesis', 'Exodus', 'Numbers' and 'Revelation'? Children may recognise the first three as the first, second and fourth books of the Old Testament, the fourth as the final book of the New Testament. What do you think the significance of these names might be? Do you think the chapter titles give you any clue to the action about to unfold, either locations or events, or to the author's voice? Children might pick up on puns and locations or cultural references, e.g., **The Boy from Brazil**, **V for Venomous**, **Terminal Velocity**, **Ring of Steel**... What is the effect of sharing a joke or association with the author?*
- Read aloud the Prologue (page 11). Give the children time and space to reflect on and discuss what they have heard and consider:
 - *What do you think is happening in what you have just heard? Who are the main characters and what do you learn about them?*
 - *What impression do you form of Alex Rider? How do you think he and Jack get on? Do they remind you of other characters you have met in books or films?*
 - *How do the sentences, '**Alex was convinced that his time as a spy was all behind him now.//He was wrong.**' make you feel? Why do you think the author has constructed these sentences in this way? What impact do they have on you as a reader?*
- Reflect on the scene at Lord Clifford's house.
 - *What did it make you think about, and how did it make you feel; what made you feel this way? Why do you think the author is relating the seemingly innocent scene of Girl Guides selling cupcakes? How do the final three paragraphs draw the two episodes together and prepare you for the story that is about to unfold? What do you predict will happen in the story?*
 - *Have you read a book with a prologue before? What do you think this device aims to do? How does this short chapter fit into the story as a whole, and how does it relate to what is to come? How is it different from an opening chapter?*
- Having discussed the contents of the prologue — what it tells us about Alex, the murder we witness, the revelation that London will come under attack in three weeks — ask the children to note their predictions for the rest of the story based on what they have read.

PART ONE: GENESIS (PAGES 23 TO 129)

- After reading the eight chapters in the first section of the story, **The End of Alex**, page 23; **Flamengo Park**, page 34; **The Big Skull**, page 47; **The Boy from Brazil**, page 60; **V for Venomous**, page 71; **Engine Trouble**, page 81; **Spy Story**, page 95; **The House of Dolls**, page 114, ask the group to summarise this section of the book, so that they reach consensus on how things stand with Alex, his reluctant return to spying, the threat that Nightshade and its child assassins represent. You may find it helpful to make a note of the key events to come back to and add to as the story progresses. Come back together to discuss:
 - *What do you think we have found out about Alex's life and career as a spy; the child assassins, one of whom has been detained and attempted to escape capture; the*

relationship between Mrs Jones, John Crawley and Dominic Royce? How do you predict the author will bring these different elements together in the story?

- *What are your feelings towards Mrs Jones and John Crawley, and towards Dominic Royce? How do you think the author wants us to feel about them? Is it right for Mrs Jones, and her predecessor Alan Blunt, to have expected Alex to do an adult's job and place himself in danger? Why do you think the author puts a reasonable opinion — that Alex should not be exploited — in the mouth of someone like Royce who seems unpleasant? What is the effect of disliking someone with whom we agree?*
 - *How do the murder of the agent Pablo, and the boy's dramatic attempted escape from prison make you feel? What impression do the children's ruthless and deadly methods make on you? How and why do you think they have acquired these skills? How do you think they might relate to the Girl Guides from the Prologue?*
 - *Why do you think Alex is keen to return to the normality of school life and reluctant to be drawn back into the world of MI6 Special Operations? How do you think he deals with these opposing demands?*
- Ask the children to discuss their responses to the text so far. The group can begin to explore their responses to it with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls **'the four basic questions'**. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:
- *Tell me ... was there anything you liked about this text?*
 - *Was there anything that you particularly disliked?*
 - *Was there anything that puzzled you?*
 - *Were there any patterns ... any connections that you noticed?*
- As you read on through the story, the children will benefit from regular opportunities to return to these questions and share their personal responses to the key events and character developments as they occur.
- Invite children to consider how the author conveys the excitement of the action scenes, such as the assassination of Pablo (page 36, **'Halfway across the road...'** to page 46, **'And then he died.'**) or Freddy's attempted escape from prison (page 50, **'And then the boy spoke.'** to page 57, **'... staring at Crawley.'**). Provide copies of the text while you read aloud and ask the children to **text mark**, looking at the language and structure of these parts of the story, highlighting points of note, identifying features that stand out for them, making connections between parts of the narrative and asking further questions about the text. You could then go on to invite the children to prepare their own reading of this section, thinking about how they might convey the tension to an audience.
- Read aloud page 111, **'She fell silent...'** to page 114, **'... she'll leave me alone.'** and allow time and space to reflect on what they have heard. As a group, go on to discuss:
- *What have you found out in this passage that advances your understanding of the story and Alex's unique position to be able to help? What questions do you still have?*
 - *How does Alex's dilemma make you feel? How do you think he should proceed? What do you think will happen next?*
 - *How do you think he might feel about passing himself off as Julius Grief, and the danger this might place him in? How do you know? What do you think his reactions tell you about his personality?*

- Reflect on the events of the story so far and the character of Alex. Ask the children to complete a **Role on the Wall** for him. To do this, have a prepared template of a boy onto which the children can record their ideas. Ask the children to write words or phrases sharing what they know about his outward appearance or other information about him from the story events on the outside of the outline. Then, use these to begin to infer and deduce his internal feelings and characteristics and note these on the inside of the outline.
- To promote a higher level of thinking, ask the children to consider what we know from what he says and what is said about him by other characters and by the narrator, and what we have to infer from body language, gestures and actions. Support the children in making explicit links between the external and internal. For example, what does something Alex does — escaping from the two MI6 Special Operations agents outside school — tell us about his personality? Or, how does Alex’s personality — his sense of duty and of right and wrong — make a specific action seem most likely?
- Encourage the children to continue to return to the **Role on the Wall** as you continue to read the story, using a different colour each time to highlight the knowledge they gain as they read on.
- Another way to organise the children’s thinking about the different characters would be to plot Venn diagrams to identify the similarities and differences between them, e.g., a two circle Venn diagram to organise thinking about Alex and Freddy Grey; or a three circle Venn diagram to clarify thinking about Mrs Jones, John Crawley and Dominic Royce.

PART TWO: EXODUS (PAGES 133 TO 249)

- After reading the chapters in the next section of the story, **Back to Jail**, page 133; **Doing Time**, page 145; **The Dead Spot**, page 162; **Cell Mates**, page 174; **The Key**, page 181; **No Way Out**, page 192; **Over the Wall**, page 204; **Downhill All the Way**, page 219 and **La Máquina**, page 230, ask the children to summarise what they have heard, to enable them to arrive at a shared understanding of the events described, the impact these have on Alex and the other characters, and how the plot has been advanced. Come back together to discuss:
 - *How do you think Alex might feel to take on the identity of his dead nemesis Julius Grief and to enter the prison in Gibraltar? What do you think are the challenges for him in taking on someone else’s personality, especially in a hostile setting?*
 - *Do you think it is right for Mrs Jones to send Alex into danger, where even the governor and guards — who should be on his side — oppose him and only Dr Flint connects him to the outside world?*
 - *What impression do the other inmates of the prison make on you? How do Alex/Julius and Freddy/Number Nine relate to them?*
- Encourage the children to organise their thinking about Alex’s fellow prisoners by adding a quick **pen portrait** of each to the Reading Journal. A pen portrait is an informal description of a person or a group of people, a character sketch in words. A pen portrait may discuss ‘hard’ facts, such as age or gender, but it should also focus on ‘softer’ aspects, such as attitudes and appearance. The inmates are introduced on page 119, **‘Mrs Jones had told Alex that as well as Freddy there were six prisoners being held in Gibraltar.’** but their personalities and histories and relationships with Julius are elaborated while Alex is with them. Information you could include in the pen portrait might be name, appearance, background, likes and dislikes, as well as any other ideas they have expressed and the writer’s own inferences about them from what they have read.
 - *What specific danger do you think Alex is in from the inmates he is imprisoned with?*
 - *How do you think he might feel to be with them, and to be sharing a cell with Freddy Grey, whom we know to be a ruthless killer?*

- Consider with the children how Alex succeeds in befriending Freddy, how he has to change his plans when he learns of his murderous plans for escape, and how the two manage to break out together without harming anyone.
 - *How do you think Alex manages to win Freddy over? What do you think are the key episodes that help him gain his trust so he takes him into his confidence?*
 - *What do you find out about Freddy from his interactions with Alex and the other prisoners?*
 - *What do you think Freddy's behaviour tells us about the Nightshade organisation and its plans?*
- The children could create a second **Role on the Wall** for Freddy Grey, as well as updating the one they have already created for Alex, adding any insights into his character that his time in prison provides.
- Alex and Freddy's dramatic escape is thrillingly captured. Discuss with the children how the tension is sustained from their entry and escape from the villa (**Over the Wall**, page 204), their scramble downhill to the abandoned cinema (**Downhill All the Way**, page 219), and their flight to Tangier in the hands of drug smugglers (**La Máquina**, page 230). Invite them to re-read aloud passages that they find especially exciting, identifying the features of the writing that convey the sense of adventure.

PART THREE: NUMBERS (PAGES 253 TO 347)

- Complete these activities after the children have read the seven chapters in this section: **Kids in Crisis**, page 253; **Voices**, page 270; **Hand to Hand**, page 283; **The Temple**, page 297; **Rogue Operation**, page 313; **Terminal Velocity**, page 322; **Number Twenty-Six**, page 335, so that they can effectively summarise, discuss and respond to the next section of the story.
- Having taken us to school in Chelsea, a park in Rio de Janeiro, the MI6 safe house, and prison and an abandoned cinema in Gibraltar, the author offers us another interesting location, the Nightshade camp on Crete. Begin this session with an exercise to deepen the children's response to the setting and unpick how the author has elicited the response.
- Read aloud the opening of the chapter **Kids in Crisis**, page 253, **'At the very east of the island...'** to page 258, **'...up and down the road'**. Ask the children to **visualise** the scene in their mind's eye as you are reading aloud, closing their eyes and picturing the scene unfolding as if it were a scene in a film. Read the section aloud two or three times and then ask them to describe to a partner what they pictured. You could give the children simple art materials to depict their visualisation.
- Following this, ask the children to share what they imagined and to identify key vocabulary or phrases which support their understanding or interpretation. For example, **'... famous for its palm forest and tropical sand...'** or **'... at the end of a rough track that climbed steeply into the hills with warning signs in Greek and English...'** or **'... more than a dozen buildings had been constructed close to one another, forming what was effectively a village with its own little square...'** or **'... everything was made of stone, painted white against the glare of the summer sun...'** or **'... made almost entirely of white marble, shaped like a Greek temple with massive columns and wide steps leading up to the main entrance...'** Ask the children why particular words or phrases stood out to them.
 - *What made them so vivid or memorable?*
 - *What impression is created by the author through the descriptions?*
 - *How do these descriptions make you feel?*

- *What might you be thinking if you were an onlooker?*
- Discuss the impact on Alex of the change of scene.
 - *How do you think he might feel to find himself in Crete, what impression do you have of the training camp? What gives you this impression? What aspects of the arrangements stand out for you?*
 - *What do you think or feel about the other children Alex meets — the ‘Numbers’ of the title — and the Teachers who run the camp? You could invite the children to complete further **pen portraits** to manage their recollection of the various characters Alex meets.*
- The regime at Vai is portrayed as very strict. *Why do you think the Teachers treat the children as they do? How does it affect them? How do you feel about it? Is their treatment of the Numbers different from Mrs Jones (and previously Alan Blunt), who might be considered to be exploiting Alex by asking him to do things inappropriate for a child?*
- Ask the children to summarise the chapters they have read in this section of the book, giving them time and space to reflect on what they have read and supporting each other in interpreting the events described and how these affect Alex and advance the plot. This section moves us inexorably closer to Nightshade’s attack on London, and the form it will take.
 - *How does it feel to try and make sense — as Alex has to, in role as Julius Grief — of the clues he gets to the nature of the planned attack? What form do you think it will take, what details do you think are relevant? Who do you think is the target, and why might they have been chosen?*
 - *What do you think Alex is able to find out by his cunning break-in to the temple? Why do you think the Teachers have chosen children as their agents, and how do they manage to control them: is it just brainwashing or do you think there is something more?*
 - *How well do you think Alex-as-Julius has assimilated with the Numbers? What do you think they - especially Freddy Grey and Mrs Jones’s children William and Sofia - make of him? How do you know? How do you think Alex might feel to be named as Number Twenty-Six and to find he is part of the mission? How do his unmasking by the Teachers, and their use of Alex-as-Julius as a decoy, make you feel? What implications does it have for his ability to foil the attack?*
 - *What do you think will happen next? Do you think Alex will be able to avert disaster? What makes you think this? If you think he will, how will he manage it? If you think he won’t, how would this affect the course of the story?*
- Yet again Alex finds himself in an impossible situation, caught in an apparently insoluble dilemma: the children could write a brief **note of advice**, summarising what he has so far achieved, and why you think he can be successful.

PART FOUR: REVELATION (PAGES 351 TO 439)

- After the children have read the chapters in the final section of the story, **Ring of Steel**, page 351; **The Last Day**, page 354; **Smoke and Fire**, page 363; **Across London**, page 375; **Leap of Faith**, page 388; **The Ornamental Gallery**, page 405; **A Few Loose Ends**, page 419; **Delhi Station**, page 434, allow the children time and space to summarise this section, and to reflect on what they have read, how the resolution of the story has affected them, and how they feel about the book as a whole. You may ask the group:

- *What thoughts are you left with upon hearing the resolution of the story? How does the author draw everything together in one place? How does the end of the story leave you feeling? Do you have any unanswered questions?*
- *How do you respond to the way the author goes on to end the story? Do you feel this is the right outcome for Owen Andrews and Dominic Royce? What about the Numbers, especially Freddy Grey and Mrs Jones’s children?*
- *How do you think the author wants us to feel about the Numbers, and their return to normality? How do you feel about the fate of the Teachers, and their plans for revenge on Alex, of which he is as yet unaware? What form might a sequel to this story take?*
- *How do you think each of the characters feels? How do you know?*
- Invite the children to choose and read aloud short extracts of this final section that they particularly enjoyed or found effective, sharing the reasons why they selected them. Use this as the basis for further **text marking**, giving them insights, for example, into how the author sustains tension, paces action, uses dialogue for effect or leaves a cliff-hanger, depending on the excerpts the children choose.
- Revisit Aidan Chambers’ four basic questions, giving the children the opportunity to reflect.
 - *Did you enjoy this story? What did you like or dislike?*
 - *What puzzles did it contain?*
 - *What links do you see to other stories you already know?*
- The Alex Rider series offers **‘Action. Adrenaline. Adventure.’** *Do you think this promise has been kept here? Who do you think would enjoy this book — is this **‘every bored schoolboy’s fantasy’** and **‘perfect escapism for all teenage boys’**, as reviewers for The Independent on Sunday and The Times suggest? Do you think this is a fair quote? Could/would girls enjoy it too? Should we categorise books by gender? How does this sit with your perceptions of the story? How do its themes, storylines and characters sit with wider world issues around gender? What questions are you left with after reading? Do you agree with the other praise inside the front cover?*
- Encourage the children to review the text from their own perspective, looking at how to build a constructive review that would support other readers. They should look at how to offer a broad and balanced opinion, and use the language of praise and critique constructively, following on from the opinions shared in the book talk discussions. You could look at reviews on a range of sites such as *Books for Keeps*, to consider the purpose, form, audience and language of book reviews.

AFTER READING, YOU COULD ALSO: HOT SEATING, GRAPH OF EMOTION, REPEAT ACTIVITIES

- Consider the different characters, the plot and the different settings. Children might like to repeat the visualisation activity from Session 4, with different settings, e.g., Brighton beach, the Shard, the interior of St Paul’s, the House of Dolls...
 - *How does the author use the different settings of Brazil, Chelsea, (the prison in) Gibraltar, (the training camp in) Crete, Brighton beach, the Shard and St Paul’s Cathedral? How important do you think they are to the story? Do these real world settings help to create a credible background to the story?*
 - *Which character, aspect of the story, incident or episode interested the group the most?*
 - *Did any of the characters remind you of characters in other books?*

- Review the story in chronological order and consider the different emotions that Alex has felt throughout the story, the high and low points, using the **Role on the Wall** to support discussion of his emotional journey. They could also revisit the Contents page, to see whether their predictions about the story that lay ahead proved accurate, and reconsider the significance of the Biblical section headings.
- You could use **hot-seating** to explore the feelings of any of the characters further; in hot-seating one member of the group role-plays a central character from a poem or story and is interviewed by the other children. This activity involves children closely examining a character's motivation and responses. The children could work collaboratively to choose words that describe a character's emotions at different points of the story. Write these on post-it notes and then organise them to demonstrate shades of emotional intensity that they have felt in the story and create a **graph of emotion**. You could also explore the emotional journey of other characters such as Dominic Royce or Mrs Jones, John Crawley and Jack Starbright which might be especially interesting for pupils who have encountered these characters in previous stories so have insight into their longer term development.
- Through modelling, ask the children to describe their favourite part of the story. Provide the children with an oral scaffold for example: *the most memorable part of the story was... because...; my top moment in the story was... because...* and in pairs ask them to identify their favourite part of the narrative. Encourage children to give reasons for their choices and invite some children to share these.
- If possible, leave copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time if they want to, by themselves or socially in a group.
- Children could find out more about the key locations of the story, e.g., Brazil, Crete, Gibraltar, the Shard <https://www.theviewfromtheshard.com/> and St Paul's Cathedral, especially its Galleries <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/history-collections/history/explore-the-cathedral/climb-the-dome>.
- Children could find out more about the author Anthony Horowitz from his website <https://www.anthonhorowitz.com/> and from the many interviews and videos that can be easily found, where he talks about his writing and inspiration. Further titles he has written are suggested below, and children might be interested to see how prolific he is, and how he has written for adults as well as children, and for TV and print journalism as well as novels.

OTHER SUGGESTED TITLES BY ANTHONY HOROWITZ OR TO FURTHER SUPPORT THE EXPLORATION OF THEMES ARISING FROM THE BOOK:

Other titles in the Alex Rider series
by Anthony Horowitz

Stormbreaker (Alex Rider #1)

Point Blanc (Alex Rider #2)

Skeleton Key (Alex Rider #3)

Eagle Strike (Alex Rider #4)

Scorpia (Alex Rider #5)

Ark Angel (Alex Rider #6)

Snakehead (Alex Rider #7)

Crocodile Tears (Alex Rider #8)

Scorpia Rising (Alex Rider #9)

Russian Roulette (Alex Rider #10)

Never Say Die (Alex Rider #11)

Secret Weapon (Alex Rider #12)

The first six Alex Rider novels
have been adapted as Graphic Novels
by Anthony Johnston

Stormbreaker,
illustrated by Kanako and Yuzuru

Point Blanc,
illustrated by Kanako and Yuzuru

Skeleton Key,
illustrated by Kanako and Yuzuru

Eagle Strike,
illustrated by Kanako and Yuzuru

Scorpia,
illustrated by Emma Vieceli
and Kate Brown

Ark Angel,
illustrated by Emma Vieceli
and Amrit Birdi

Alex Rider has also appeared on screen: a
film adaptation was directed by Geoffrey
Sax (2006), a first series for TV created
by Guy Burt appeared in 2020, a second
series is in the pipeline.

The Power of Five fantasy adventure series
by Anthony Horowitz for KS3 readers

Book One: Raven's Gate

Book Two: Evil Star

Book Three: Nightrise

Book Four: Necropolis

Book Five: Oblivion

Standalone books
by Anthony Horowitz

The Devil and His Boy

Granny

Groosham Grange

Return to Groosham Grange

The Switch

Scared to Death

The Diamond Brothers humorous
detective agency series
by Anthony Horowitz
for KS2 readers

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

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