

Snakehead Study Guide

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Plot Summary

"Snakehead" is the seventh book in the Alex Rider series. Since Alex is fourteen years old, the youngest secret service operative to have served Britain, the United States and Australia, the book lands into the young adult genre. The story follows a heroic novel plotline.

Alex falls to earth in a space capsule and is picked up by a military vessel near Australia. The Australian secret services enlist his help in a mission, and because his godfather, Ash, will be his partner, Alex accepts after a period of reluctance. The mission involves Ash posing as a refugee from Afghanistan and Alex playing his son. The first part of their mission takes place in Bangkok, Thailand. They take a sleazy room in Bangkok's Chinatown, one of the most impoverished places on earth, and wait to be contacted by the snakehead (no capitalization). The snakehead is an organization of criminals known for its ruthlessness. The snakehead people arrive and accept a large sum of money in exchange for falsified identification to be used in Australia, where Ash and Alex are supposedly seeking asylum. The objective of their mission is to determine where the false identification is created.

Nothing goes smoothly for Alex from this point on until the climax in the second-to-last chapter. Instead of delivering the identification documents, the snakehead people want Alex to pick them up himself, and alone. He makes the rendezvous only to be taken to an illegal martial arts fight in an old warehouse located on an island in a polluted river. Alex fights but nearly loses until he cheats by spitting water into his opponent's face. Alex wins the fight, but because he should not have done that, the spectators and his captors start rioting. Having nowhere else to go, he drops into the river, hijacks a ferry boat and makes his escape.

The next leg of the mission takes place in Jakarta, Indonesia. Alex and Ash are taken to a toy warehouse where a raid by the Indonesian special forces takes place shortly after. During the pandemonium, Alex and Ash jump inside a van that brings them to the loading docks. There Alex is forced into a shipping container with other refugees and is separated from Ash. The container is loaded onto a ship, and he begins his journey to Australia. About a day later, Alex blows the door to the container using spy devices that the British had provided him and discovers the powerful bomb, Royal Blue, on board. Through his cleverness and quick reactions, Alex succeeds in escaping the ship but is later captured by Major Winston Yu, Alex's main antagonist.

Yu sends Alex to a hospital located deep within the Australian wilderness. The hospital exists to harvest organs from Major Yu's enemies and sell them on the black market. Alex soon realizes he must escape when a customer for his eyes arrives. Again through cleverness and quick wits, Alex manages to escape the hospital, burn it down on his way out, and nearly loses his life on a river with rapids and a deadly waterfall. Rescued by his friends in the special forces, Alex accompanies them on the mission to stop Major Yu's plan to create a tsunami that will kill eight targeted people and thousands more

that, to Yu does not matter. The mission is successful, Alex detonates the bomb, the shock wave kills Yu but does not cause a tsunami, and Alex triumphantly returns home.



Chapter 1, Down to Earth; Chapter 2,

Chapter 1, Down to Earth; Chapter 2, Summary

Alex Rider falls within a space capsule to the ocean near Australia in Chapter 1. He is only fourteen years old, but he has been in space. This surprises the American diver who opens the capsule and a medical officer who looks him over on the USS Kitty Hawk. After showering, Alex lays down on a bed made from memory foam and starts to drift asleep. He thinks he hears familiar voices, but he is not sure if the people talking are friends or foes. He remembers a little of what had occurred before his splashdown, a fight with a person named Kaspar, a scheme for making money that was masterminded by a billionaire named Nicolei Drevin, and an organization named Scorpia.

In Chapter 2 a meeting takes place with a group of evil characters who are members of Scorpia. The name of the organization is derived from the words sabotage, corruption, intelligence, and assassination. They had all at one time been spies who decided to go into business for themselves. Their most recent plan is to kill eight people who are to gather on Reef Island which is located in the Timor Sea off of Australia. The eight people consist of various famous and well-liked celebrities who want to do good in the world, such as bring aid to Africa. Reducing poverty, war, and pestilence in the world runs contrary to the concerns of many rich people, so Scorpia has been hired for ten million dollars to kill the eight do-gooders.

The members of Scorpia discuss how to kill all eight people at once and leave no suspicions about their deaths. They decide to use a prototype bomb called Royal Blue and located not far away in a secure facility. The members of Scorpia easily take the bomb using a wrecked car with a bloodied family in it, but the family consists of Scorpia operatives in disguise. They kill the guards when they come out to help and break into the building using poison gas in the ventilation system and explosives. The Scorpia operatives then push the bomb into a waiting ambulance. After depositing their prize in a predetermined place, the operatives destroy all evidence of their crime.

Chapter 1, Down to Earth; Chapter 2, Analysis

The story picks up the adventures of Alex Rider, the fourteen-year-old protagonist, at the very end of his last thrilling experience. This marks the book as part of a series that features him and other characters. The most unique thing about Alex is his age. He is the youngest operative in covert operations who has experience with the British and Americans. In this story, he will be working with the Australians to break up a gang of thugs known as the snakehead. These people are more vicious than Scorpia and deal in human trafficking.



The meeting of Scorpia sets up a parallel plotline. The scheme to kill eight influential people with a stolen bomb and make it seem like a natural disaster does not at this time involve Alex. However, once set into motion, the parallel plotline will need to bend toward and intersect Alex's story. Bringing in Scorpia neatly ties the previous book with this one, as does the opening scene of Alex plunging to earth in a space capsule.



Chapter 3, Visa Problems; Chapter 4, No Picnic

Chapter 3, Visa Problems; Chapter 4, No Picnic Summary

In Chapter 3 Ethan Brook looks over Alex Rider's file while flying in an executive jet. He is the chief executive of CAD (Covert Action Division) of ASIS (Australian Secret Intelligence Service). Marc Damon of CAD fills in the details not included with the official documents. He tells Brook that Alex had been involved with other secret missions and had become an accomplished operative even at the age of fourteen. This was due to having been raised by his uncle, Ian Rider, an active operator with M16.

The Australians take Alex to SAS (Special Air Services) compound in Swanbourne. There he is invited by soldiers ten years older than him to a beach cookout. Alex has vague feelings of anxiety as they drive out, but all seems well once they arrive at the beach. He goes with one of the soldiers to collect firewood and becomes lost in the woods. Night has fallen, and the sky is moonless. Suddenly the darkness and silence is shattered by a bomb. More bombs fall, and Alex realized that he has been caught in a training exercise that uses live ammunition. He rolls under a barbed wire fence when he can and starts walking across the field. He steps on a mine and freezes.

A soldier finds him there and explains that the mine will go off in fifteen minutes even if Alex were to keep his foot on the pressure plate. The soldier goes to find help. Alex decides to jump off the mine and roll down a hill to a ditch rather than waiting helplessly for the mine to automatically explode. He does this and avoids any injury as the mine blows up just a few seconds after his leap. Some minutes later, the live ammunition exercise ends, and the soldiers who had driven Alex to the beach find him. They seem genuinely concerned for his safety and take all the blame for nearly causing his death.

Chapter 3, Visa Problems; Chapter 4, No Picnic Analysis

The Australians have plans for Alex, but they must act swiftly. They must first determine if the boy has the ability to take on the mission, although on paper he seems right for the job. The incident in the woods where Alex is shelled and shot at in a supposed training exercise has more significance than merely being a close call. The author uses light foreshadowing by expressing Alex's doubts and a little about what he will think about the incident later on. In some way Alex was tricked, but he does not see how or why for now. This storytelling technique helps build suspense and promotes reader interest.



Chapter 5, On the Rocks; Chapter 6, City of Angels?

Chapter 5, On the Rocks; Chapter 6, City of Angels? Summary

In Chapter 5 Jack Starbright, Alex's young female housekeeper, arrives in Sydney to bring him back home to London, but he has to stay until his Australian visa is straightened out. They go to a place they think is the visa office, but the room they enter is obviously not an office. Here they meet Ethan Brooke and Marc Damon of the ASIS. Brooke offers Alex a proposition to help an agent in Bangkok by posing as a refugee child. The agent is Ash, who goes by only that name. These are his initials, ASH, and he never divulges his full name. At first Jack speaks for Alex, and then she lets him tell the two men that he would think about the proposition and get back to them. The mission is described as dangerous and involving criminals who are together known as the snakehead. That night Alex accepts the assignment because he wants to meet Ash, his godfather and someone who had known his parents well. He wants to find out about them, since they had both died when he was very young.

In Chapter 6 Alex arrives in Bangkok. He spots a mysterious man who is looking him over in the airport, but he does not know what to think about that. At the hotel he meets Ash, who describes what the mission will be like. Alex is to play dumb, not saying a word, and following directions without question. His living experiences will be difficult as he and Ash make their way through the impoverished areas of the region disguised as a refugee father from Afghanistan and his son.

Chapter 5, On the Rocks; Chapter 6, City of Angels? Analysis

These chapters lay out the challenges that Alex will be facing. He must play a role as a refugee boy in a culture he does not understand. He has never been to the East and does not speak any of the local languages. His appearance must be masked, and he needs to avoid speaking at all. His living environments will be impoverished. He will need to eat unsavory and possibly spoiled food. On top of this, Ash has refused to talk about his parents, which was the primary reason why Alex had accepted the assignment in the first place. Fortunately for him, Ash softens up and offers to talk about his parents when the time is right, but not of their deaths. Something about this disturbs Ash, which implies he might have had something to do with their deaths.

The mysterious man who is following Alex adds intrigue to the story. He is likely a London operative because he wears the distinctive poppy in the airport, a possible signal to Alex who does take notice. However, this man may also be an operative from

Scorpia and therefore a threat. The question is how does Alex's mission tie into the scheme that Scorpia has developed to kill eight important people all at once and leave no suspicions?



Chapter 7, Father and Son; Chapter 8, First Contact

Chapter 7, Father and Son; Chapter 8, First Contact Summary

In Chapter 7 Mrs. Webber, nicknamed Cloudy Webber, disguises Alex and Ash as refugees from Afghanistan. She darkens their skin with dye, makes their teeth look bad and has them wear dirty old clothes. Alex learns more about his father, and when Ash mentions Yassen Gregorovich, Alex becomes interested. Although the man is now dead, Alex had met him during a previous adventure. Once the disguises are completed, Alex and Ash are brought into Bangkok's Chinatown, a miserably poor area. They find the apartment where they are to wait for the snakehead people who would make forged documentation for gaining entry into Australia. The point of the mission is to find where the forged documentation is made.

In Chapter 8 the snakehead people arrive, Anan Sukit and a photographer. After their photos are taken for the documentation forgeries, Sukit insists that Alex come alone to pick up the documents. Ash argues with the man but must agree. Alex goes to the nightclub part of Bangkok as directed, is picked up in an old, rundown car and brought across the river to a dilapidated warehouse. Here he is forced to fight with a master at Muay Thai, an especially vicious form of martial arts. Alex knows karate and survives the first round. Then he decides that if he is to survive any further, he will need to cheat.

Chapter 7, Father and Son; Chapter 8, First Contact Analysis

The plot rapidly places Alex into an impossible situation. The original plan falls apart, and because neither he nor Ash can simply walk away without being killed, they both have to play along with whatever Sukit has in mind. This turns out to be an illegal fighting and betting operation, and Alex's opponent is older, stronger, and more experienced. The first round follows a typical fight scene in which Alex is hurt badly, and his opponent is described in terms that make him seem invincible and evil. The last sentence in Chapter 8 sets up a dramatic scene to come: "He was just going to have to cheat" (p. 120).

The author uses vivid sensory impressions to bring out the squalor of the settings. Sight is used less than smell, and the sounds of mosquitoes in the fighting ring add to the impression of Alex's misery before the fight begins. During the fight, the action moves quickly, and the taste of blood in Alex's mouth emphasizes the seriousness of the predicament. He will likely either lose his life or come out crippled for life, if he is lucky. If he is clever enough, he may come out just fine and gain a step up on his antagonists.



Chapter 9, Once Bitten . . .; Chapter 10, Wat Ho

Chapter 9, Once Bitten . . .; Chapter 10, Wat Ho Summary

In Chapter 9 Alex faces his opponent again, but this time he has thought of a trick. When they are in a clinch, he spits water that he had been given between rounds into his opponent's eyes, momentarily blinding him and causing him to loosen his hold. Alex then connects with an uppercut to his jaw and a powerful kick to his solar plexus. The knocked out champion falls to the floor, and immediately the crowd becomes hostile to Alex. Sukit draws a pistol and starts firing at him just as the lights go out. In the pandemonium Alex manages to find a hiding place in one of the side rooms, and as snakehead henchmen go door-to-door searching for him, he drops through a rotted hole in the floor and into the river. From there he steals a ferryboat and makes his escape, but not before explosions are heard, the warehouse catches fire and drops into the river.

In Chapter 10 Major Winston Yu discusses Alex and the mess he had created in Bangkok with fellow Scorpia member, Zeljan Kurst. Sukit had been shot from behind while he was trying to shoot Alex in the ferryboat, so now Yu must select a new lieutenant for the snakehead. Yu is the leader of the snakehead and does not worry about finding an appropriate replacement. Kurst warns Yu about underestimating Alex, as had been done before in a previous story.

Alex finds Ash and apologizes for messing up the operation, but Ash is also very sorry that things had taken a wrong turn and nearly cost Alex his life. Later on in the day, Alex notices that he is being followed by the same mysterious man from the airport and decides to follow him instead. The man leads Alex to the Wat Ho temple complex and gets the drop on him. The man then prompts Alex at gunpoint to enter the temple through a red door. There Alex recognizes the man as Ben Daniels, a British operative with whom he had worked with before. The room turns out to be the Bangkok office of M16 Special Operations, and Alex learns that it had been Daniels who shut off the lights and threw grenades at the warehouse.

Chapter 9, Once Bitten . . .; Chapter 10, Wat Ho Analysis

When the hero of an adventure story, or in this case a spy thriller, finds him or herself in a tight situation, only a limited number of things can happen. The hero can use cleverness to get out of the jam, work the antagonists against each other, or run away in a panic while hoping that someone will help out or that something will happen to her or his advantage. In this part of the story, Alex finds a convenient hole in the floor to drop



through into the river. Meanwhile, he is helped out by Daniels, an unexpected ally against the antagonists. This is not revealed to the reader until after the scene, which is one way to keep the reader interested.

The difficult part of constructing the plot for this kind of story is to keep the fortunate circumstances for the hero believable. A key element to Alex's escape is the ferryboat, and that was introduced early on as the vehicle that brought more snakehead henchmen to the warehouse. Alex has not yet hit upon the idea of escaping in it, and when he does, he is already in the river. Additionally, the reader only knows that for some reason the warehouse caught fire, not who or what did it. The explanation comes later and is entirely logical: Alex had been followed by a friend, and he helped out. A less believable circumstance would have been the warehouse experiencing a gas explosion at just the right moment for the hero, even though in real life that happens. The point is that fiction must be even more believable than actual life, in which random, disconnected events happen all the time.



Chapter 11, Armed and Dangerous; Chapter 12, The Silent Streets

Chapter 11, Armed and Dangerous; Chapter 12, The Silent Streets Summary

In Chapter 11 Alex talks with Mrs. Jones, head of M16 Special Operations. She is miffed that the Australians have recruited Alex without letting her know, but Alex reminds her that he does not work for M16. She then informs him that Major Yu, a former M16 employee with a successful military background, is in charge of the snakehead, and Alex realizes that he may be dealing with Scorpia again. Mrs. Jones also lets Alex know about the stolen Royal Blue bomb, an advanced version of the Daisy Cutter conventional ordinance. This version can take out an entire city block, whereas the Daisy Cutter was able to destroy a single building or clear a jungle enough for landing helicopters. Alex then goes to visit Smithers, a large fat man who builds spy gadgets for M16 agents. There he obtains a special watch with a beacon built into it and explosive coins capable of blowing open locks and putting holes in walls. He also takes a belt with hidden survival materials inside it. Smithers has other gadgets of interest, but because Alex is disguised as an impoverished refugee from Afghanistan, he has to keep his possessions to a minimum.

In Chapter 12 Alex goes back to Ash in the dingy apartment where they had waited for the snakehead contact. Ash immediately notices Alex's watch and belt, expresses that the watch may be okay because it was broken, but the belt is too nice for the disguise. Alex covers it with his shirt. The next leg of their mission is to go to Jakarta by jetliner, Ash as a sales representative for a cheap toy company and Alex as his son. On the flight Ash finally agrees to tell Alex about his parents. He learns that his mother had been a doctor, and she had met his father while patching up his bullet wound. She likely had guessed at what his father did for a living from the gunshot wound, which did not stop her from falling in love. She later became pregnant with Alex. The plan was for Alex's father to quit the M16 work, go underground and marry his mother in France where they wanted to live normal lives. However, an M16 operation went bad, exposing Alex's father to Scorpia. The flight that his parents were taking to France blew up on the tarmac, killing his parents. Ash takes responsibility for their deaths because his actions caused the mission to go bad and Scorpia to target Alex's father. Alex forgives him.

Chapter 11, Armed and Dangerous; Chapter 12, The Silent Streets Analysis

The plotline that begins with the Scorpia meeting in London starts to intersect with Alex's mission for the Australians when Mrs. Jones tells him about the plot to do something with the Royal Blue bomb that had been stolen. At this point only Scorpia



and the reader know what the target is, and that will be in the sea north of Australia. Ash and Alex flying to Jakarta brings them closer to where Scorpia's target is, so the intersection of the plotlines will occur soon. Ash and Alex have no idea that their mission, although almost over, will become seriously complicated as they become sucked into the action around Scorpia's plan.

A theme element is revealed in Chapter 12: The life of an undercover agent in covert intelligence is not glamorous but lonesome. Normal human relations cannot bloom as they do for people with normal careers, and if someone like Alex's mother falls in love with an operative, she might not live very long. This realism separates the story from pulp fiction in which the spy always gets the glamorous women and seems unaffected by short, meaningless affairs. Ash expresses this while describing Alex's parents and admitting to having had feelings for his mother. He knew at the time that he had no chance, but he also had genuinely hoped that the relationship between Alex's parents would succeed and that Alex would grow up as a normal boy. However, his uncle had adopted Alex and prepared him for life as a covert agent in intelligence. This background to the story explains why Alex keeps finding himself in decidedly abnormal circumstances. He was, in a way, born to be a spy. Although he does not look for trouble, his destiny carries him there.



Chapter 13, Unwin Toys; Chapter 14, The Liberian Star

Chapter 13, Unwin Toys; Chapter 14, The Liberian Star Summary

In Chapter 13 Alex and Ash arrive in Jakarta, Indonesia, where they are met by two men at the airport. The men bring them to a van that takes them to an Unwin Toys warehouse containing other refugees waiting to be brought to their ships. A group of soldiers known as Kopassus, the Indonesian version of Special Forces, raid the warehouse. A shootout ensues, and one of the soldiers throws a grenade. Ash and Alex barely make it to the van alive as it positions to escape the warehouse area. Unknown to the driver, they jump aboard, and once the driver realizes he has two refugee passengers in the back, he speeds to the freight loading docks and abandons the van. Three men at the docks argue with Ash using mostly gestures due to the language barrier, and Alex is separated from Ash. Alex is then given a bottle of water and a loaf of bread before being shoved into a shipping container with two dozen other refugees. His entry is through a hidden trapdoor that is intended to fool port authorities. A bar slides across the closed door, locking him in.

In Chapter 14 the container is hauled onto a ship named The Liberian Star, which starts Alex's journey toward the destination port, Darwin, Australia. After suffering in the airless container with meager light from a flashlight and a single chemical toilet for all the refugees, Alex decides to use one of his magnetic exploding coins to blow the locked trapdoor open. He had stuck one on the trapdoor before being shoved inside, and all he needs to do is activate it with the chewing gum box controller. The other refugees go into a panic after the explosion, and one old man pleads with Alex not to leave. This does not stop Alex from crawling out the blown door and between stacked shipping containers.

Alex finds that his container is in a stack on the upper deck of the ship, and discovering a way down from about thirty feet high, he gains the deck undetected. Very carefully Alex explores the ship. Still undetected, he discovers where the Royal Blue bomb is kept.

Three men are there: one technician, the captain of the ship, and Major Winston Yu. The technician helps Yu to enter his fingerprints into the bomb's computerized triggering system via a scanner. A loud alarm sounds, signaling some kind of difficulty on the ship, and all the men leave in a hurry. Quickly Alex goes to the scanner and enters his own fingerprints into the system. Alex then sneaks on deck to see what the big emergency was. The old man who had pleaded with him not to leave the container had left it himself and was captured, beaten and forced to inform the crew of Alex's presence on the ship. Major Yu shoots the old man dead and has him thrown overboard.



Chapter 13, Unwin Toys; Chapter 14, The Liberian Star Analysis

Nothing goes smoothly for Alex and Ash once they enter Jakarta. They had hoped that the rest of their mission would be easy after the first difficulties, and besides the miserable environments, that would have happened had it not been for the Kopassus raid. This is a typical plot flow for heroic adventure stories: The hero must leave a safe place, oftentimes the hero's home, and immediately run into trouble. With each passing scene, the hero's problems become worse. Through daring and luck, the hero overcomes one obstacle after another up until a final climactic ending. Then the hero triumphantly returns home.

The evil Major Yu, Alex's primary antagonist, appears in Chapter 14 right next to the dangerous object that Alex must find, the bomb known as Royal Blue. His problem becomes not only surviving the trip to Darwin but stopping the use of the bomb, and with good forethought, he puts his own fingerprints into the control system of the bomb. This action indicates that at some point in the story, perhaps at the very last moment, this will pay off by enabling the deactivation of the bomb. Part of the suspense built into Chapter 14 has to do with readers who like to predict how a story will turn out. If the story is too predictable, questioning readers might consider it to be trashy pulp fiction. The author's challenge is to stimulate the questions but move the story into unanticipated territory. How well this is done often separates good fiction from bad, although a formula plotline can be artfully done through character and/or thematic development. This story seems to be heading toward surprises at the end.



Chapter 15, Hide-and-Seek; Chapter 16, Made in Britain

Chapter 15, Hide-and-Seek; Chapter 16, Made in Britain Summary

In Chapter 15 the captain of The Liberian Star, Hermann de Wynter, tells Major Yu that a thorough search for Alex has been unsuccessful. Wynter knows how ruthless Major Yu is and fears that he will be shot on the spot. Unexpectedly, Yu takes the news in stride. He tells Wynter that Alex is a very competent secret agent, but that Yu has known his movements all along. Hoping that more time would cause Alex to make a fatal mistake, he orders the ship to delay docking for several hours. The captain informs Yu that this is impossible due to the strict timing requirements for the port. If this ship does not take its assigned timeslot, the timeslot will be given immediately to some other ship. Yu accepts this but warns Wynter to commit suicide if he fails to keep Alex from escaping the ship. Not doing so would mean a lot more pain for Wynter before his inevitable death.

Chapter 15 slides time backward to when Alex had decided to hide under Major Yu's bed. He spent the entire night there with Yu sleeping just inches away, and this put him into a position from which he heard all of the conversation between Wynter and Yu. Alex waits for Yu to leave before crawling out of his hiding place beneath Yu's bed and realizing that Yu had somehow been monitoring Alex's movements all along, perhaps far enough back as his acceptance of the Australian mission. He then decides to cause some trouble on the ship with the hope that the confusion would give him a chance to escape the ship. Alex finds a control room and uses one of his exploding coins to puncture some kind of air supply. He kicks the crew member in the control room square in the testicles and takes the man's gun. Alex then finds the ship's bridge and holds Wynter and another officer at gunpoint. Thinking quickly, Alex fires into one of the windows and jumps aboard a shipping container that is being brought onto the dock. He rides the container undetected until it is about to be let down all the way, runs for it and sneaks into the back of a pickup truck. He hides under empty boxes, and the truck takes him to a café in a remote area. He then calls Ash from an outside public phone using a special number that Alex had memorized. The number bypasses all telephony security systems, connects to Ash, and Alex tells him where he is. Ash comes, but he is the captive of Major Yu. Alex gives himself up to save Ash's life, and Major Yu hits Alex with a walking stick, knocking him out.

In Chapter 16 Alex wakes up in a nice room decorated in the British style. He finds fresh clothing in the closet, checks the door, which is locked as he expected, takes a bath and gets dressed. He searches his old jeans and finds his last exploding coin, the detonator, and the watch with the special distress signal built into it. His survival belt had been taken. At noon a maid appears and tells him that Major Yu would like Alex to join him for lunch.



At lunch Major Yu tells Alex about his youth, since Alex is not telling Yu about anything. It seems that Yu's mother had fallen in love with a British citizen, and when he found out about her pregnancy, he left her and never again made contact. Impoverished and with a baby to take care of, Yu's mother became a professional assassin for the snakehead. She made enough money through this to send Yu to private British schools and universities. From there Yu had built a successful military career, but when he came down with a serious bone illness, he had to quite. He then went to work with the British secret service and sold secrets to the snakehead. He quit this boring job and went to work for the snakehead. He quickly rose in that organization to become its leader, and then he founded Scorpia.

Alex asks what Yu plans to do with Royal Blue, and since Yu feels secure that he will have no further trouble from Alex, he explains the plans to create a tsunami that will wipe out the eight targeted people. Alex points out that tens of thousands will die on the Australian coast, but this does not concern Yu. He tells Alex what fate is in store for him: He will be flown deep into the central part of Australia to a hospital. There the doctor will remove as many organs as he can without killing Alex and draw blood at regular intervals. The organs and blood will be sold on the black market. This will go on until Alex dies, which could take years, depending on the demand for his parts.

Chapter 15, Hide-and-Seek; Chapter 16, Made in Britain Analysis

Alex puts up with the stifling conditions inside the shipping container, a large rectangular metal box with poor air circulation and an inadequate chemical toilet, only so long. Through his clever foresight, he had placed one of the magnetic exploding coins in a position to blow the rod keeping him inside. He puts all the other refugees in danger by leaving the container, and he knows that at least one of them dies, yet he feels no apparent remorse for their problems. This might indicate an intentional character flaw in the hero, which makes the character more rounded and human. Perfect heroes do not make good characters because they can never act against core principles, just as perfect villains are unconvincing characters. Major Winston Yu may be evil, but he arrived at this place in stages, as is revealed in the next chapter.

The story action moves quickly in Chapter 15, with Alex jumping from one insanely dangerous predicament to another, only to be caught at the end. His undoing is his concern for Ash's life, since he is Alex's godfather and did know his parents. This confirms that the character does have true but selective feelings for others. He could not help the refugees inside the shipping container, but he can keep Yu from killing Ash by giving himself up.

Chapter 16 gives Major Winston Yu's back-story and explains the connection between the snakehead and Scorpia. While the action has calmed down, interest is maintained as to what new problem will be presented to Alex. Yu seems too relaxed about the entire situation, and his impeccable politeness with Alex hides the seething hatred he has for the boy. When Alex learns that he will soon be cut apart to supply body parts to

the black market, Yu collects his satisfaction. The boy is worth more to him alive than dead, and he tells this to Alex with a great deal of pleasure. This looks like the end for the hero.



Chapter 17, Spare Parts; Chapter 18, Dead of Night; Chapter 19, White Water

Chapter 17, Spare Parts; Chapter 18, Dead of Night; Chapter 19, White Water Summary

In Chapter 17 Alex arrives by seaplane to the hospital. It is located in a very remote part of Australia in the rainforest area. Although the compound is surrounded by an electrified fence, the doctor tells Alex that it really is not needed. If anyone were to escape, the remoteness of the location would ensure a quick death. He also offers some hope in that Alex would be well cared for to preserve his health, and thereby the quality of the organs that will be removed as needed. Alex manages to pocket a scalpel without being caught and watches the hospital routines closely over the next few days. He thinks constantly about how he might escape, and since there is no immediate danger, he takes no chances.

In Chapter 18 Alex realizes that he must act quickly or not at all when a customer is flown in who has purchased the corneas of Alex's eyeballs. That night, Alex hatches a plan. He had stolen a scalpel the first day at the hospital, still had the signal watch and exploding coin, and he had observed the routines of the hospital closely. His first move is to drop a filing cabinet on a guard, thereby knocking him out. He then feeds a guard dog some meat laced with sedatives that he had sequestered rather than swallowing. He goes to the seaplane and loosens a pontoon with the exploding coin, with thunder masking the explosion. Using the scalpel he had stolen, he carves a hole in the fiberglass pontoon big enough that he can use the float as a kayak.

In Chapter 19 Alex takes two fuel containers out of the plane and a paddle used to help bring the plane to the dock. He fills the containers with fuel from the plane, douses the compound, runs a liquid fuse out to his makeshift kayak, and before leaving, torches the hospital.

While the hospital burns and people run around there in a panic, Alex heads into a length of rapids. The white water is strong, and the rocks are sharp. He has little control and basically tries not to die, but in the end he makes it. He had received some training in kayaking several years before, and that knowledge helped him to at least avoid stupid mistakes. Then he hears a helicopter and assumes it is from the hospital. Someone in the helicopter starts shooting at him, so he performs a quick turn and ducks under overhanging branches that formed a tunnel. This gives him brief cover, and when he emerges, more shots are fired at him. One hits the makeshift kayak right in front of him, missing his leg by an inch. The firing stops as Alex enters the next stretch of rapids, and it is worse than the first. He manages to get through, but now he is in rapid moving but clear water. Knowing that the helicopter is still following and shots would come at any moment, Alex maneuvers himself upside down, holding his breath. He stays this way as



long as possible, and when he rights himself, the helicopter had gone away. The problem is that he is going over a deadly waterfall.

Chapter 17, Spare Parts; Chapter 18, Dead of Night; Chapter 19, White Water Analysis

True to the heroic character, Alex outwits the hospital staff in a way that no other victim could. He takes what little he has and cleverly puts the components together, a common heroic trait. For good measure, he destroys the evil place on his way out, a scene that might evoke a cheer from a movie audience. Broken away from the horror of the hospital, Alex then heads into deeper trouble with the rapids and the helicopter. Only his quick reflexes and a little bit of kayaking knowledge save him, but then he goes over the waterfall. The doctor had made it a point to emphasize how deadly the falls would be, and so once again it looks like curtains for the hero. Alex is not hanging off a cliff and clinging to a small shrub; he is actually in free fall with thousands of gallons of water falling with him. This end to Chapter 19 is an unusual break, and that marks the first surprise in a series that continue to the end of the story.



Chapter 20, Batteries not Included; Chapter 21, Attack Force; Chapter 22, Dragon Nine; Chapter 23, Dinner for Three

Chapter 20, Batteries not Included; Chapter 21, Attack Force; Chapter 22, Dragon Nine; Chapter 23, Dinner for Three Summary

When Alex starts going over the falls in Chapter 20, he has a moment to think before the plunge. He knows from his earlier training that he should hold his breath and aim for the white water at the base of the falls because the air in the water will act like a cushion. He miraculously survives the falls, but the pontoon fills up with water and drags him beneath the surface. He struggles to break free before losing his held breath, and just as it seems he will drown, he gets a leg loose, then his other and pulls hard with his arms to the surface. He finds a sandy beach and ponders why his beacon watch, which he had turned on earlier at the hospital, was not bringing help. He unscrews the back and discovers that the battery is missing. Surprised and suspecting someone had to have removed it since he started the mission, Alex feels fully defeated. He then remembers that a similar location device is in the heel of his sneaker, put there by the Australians before his experiences at the beach. He locates the device and removes the battery. He then scrounges enough wire to activate his beacon watch, after which he lays down beneath a tree and sleeps.

In Chapter 21 the sound of a helicopter awakens Alex. He sees a double-bladed Chinook and greets his friend, Ben Daniels. They take the helicopter to a military base near to Darwin. There Alex debriefs several officers on his experiences. A plan develops to thwart Major Yu's scheme to create a tsunami with the Royal Blue bomb. The evil scheme involves lowering the bomb into the earth's crust right over a critical area. Exploding the bomb at the right depth and at the right time would create the deadly monster wave. Alex agrees to be part of the attack team because he had put his fingerprints into the bomb's control system, making him the only person with the authority to deactivate the bomb.

In Chapter 22 a team of British and Australian special forces plan the assault on a floating oil rig. This is where Yu plans to place the bomb. The team flies out in a helicopter, and by the time they arrive, night has fallen. They parachute out of the helicopter. Alex has jumped only once before and has a hard time staying on track, but he finally lands on the oil rig. The others follow him, since they have more control over their parachutes. Once on the rig, which is huge and has many different areas like a small city, they search for the control room where they can disable Royal Blue. At first



the search is quiet, but then one of the soldiers is discovered, and the shooting begins. Alex and Ben break into a room that turns out to be the objective. Major Yu and someone else are inside. Ben shoots the other person, who turns out to be Ash. Alex immediately understands that Ash had been working for Yu all along. Yu wounds Ben and then gets the drop on Alex. While Ash dies, he admits to everything that Alex suspects. Yu adds that Ash had also planted the bomb that killed Alex's parents. The other soldiers take control of the oil rig, and just before they burst into the control room, Major Yu makes his escape on a fast powerboat. Alex does not disable the bomb but blows it up. The shock wave that results is not a tsunami, but it is enough to break every bone in Major Yu's diseased body. He dies while escaping.

Chapter 24 brings Alex back to his home in London. Jack, his friend and housekeeper, cooks dinner. She and Alex talk about him being back in school and how life has returned to normal. Somebody rings the doorbell, and it turns out to be one of Alex's old flames. He thought he would never see her again, but she is in London for the Christmas holiday. Jack had invited her over for dinner, and the story ends with Alex letting the guest in and shutting the door.

Chapter 20, Batteries not Included; Chapter 21, Attack Force; Chapter 22, Dragon Nine; Chapter 23, Dinner for Three Analysis

The climax of the story happens in Chapter 23, one chapter away from the end of the book. Standard suspense techniques are used: The mission is at night; the odds of success are low, and only Alex can disable the bomb. There is a confrontation between the hero and the villain just before the villain's escape. The big surprise is that Ash had been working for Major Yu all the time. This explains how Yu always knew what was planned and where Alex was, and in retrospect, some of Ash's behaviors. The whole point of the mission was to kill Alex, since he had been a big problem for Major Yu in a previous story. Readers curious about the way this kind of plotline is constructed to give genuine surprise at the end may want to reread the book and pay special attention to the hints that the author provides.

Chapters 21 and 22 set up the climax in Chapter 23. Chapter 21 also gives a strong hint that Ash is somehow responsible for the missing battery in Alex's beacon watch. Chapter 24 is the anticlimax in which the hero returns home to a celebration. In this case, the celebration is a simple dinner during the Christmas season, but the surprise arrival of a special girl in Alex's life, one for whom he has romantic feelings, adds a little twist and a foreshadowing of the next set of adventures in the hero's life. The book, "Snakehead", is the seventh in a series, and ending one part of the series with a hint as to what comes next is common practice. The author provides enough explanations that the books do not need to be read in order of publication to make sense of the overall story.



Characters

Alex Rider

Alex Rider is the protagonist of the story, a fourteen-year-old boy who has the distinction of being one of the most effective covert operatives in existence. He attained this status through the training that his uncle, Ian Rider, had given him during his childhood. Alex's father was also a spy, and although his mother worked as a nurse, there is some suspicion that she might have been a covert operative, too. Both died in an explosion that Ash had planted on a plane destined for France, where his parents planned to raise Alex as a normal boy. Their deaths changed everything for him.

Alex's character has integrity and a strong sense of fairness. He takes pleasure in delivering the punishments that villains so richly deserve. He reacts to the threats on his life without hesitation, since any pause to think would mean a quick death. These qualities make Alex an heroic figure who fights against evil, but not by design. He never set out to be a spy, but he has a knack of attracting the attentions of extremely dangerous criminals. He also tends to fall from the frying pan straight into the fire, but true to his heroic character, he always prevails.

By all other measures, Alex is a normal fourteen-year-old concerned about what his classmates think regarding his long absences from school while out adventuring and having interest in a girl his age. She does not play any role in this story until the end, but her surprise appearance makes Alex entirely disoriented. He had expected to never see her again, and there she is, having come to London from America for the Christmas holiday. The story ends there and another begins.

Major Winston Yu

Major Winston Yu is the antagonist in the story, a frail old man who suffers from a bone disease and is one of the most evil villains ever to haunt the pages of a book. Yu heads the snakehead and was responsible for forming the Scorpia organization of spies gone bad. Through Scorpia, he arranges to kill eight do-gooders who threaten the fortunes of rich people dependent on world crises to keep their bank accounts healthy. The plan is to steal Royal Blue, the most powerful non-nuclear bomb on the planet, and use it to cause a tsunami north of Australia. The point is to wipe out the eight people gathered on a nearby island for a conference in one fell swoop that appears to be a natural disaster. Rather than twisting a moustache and cackling, Yu takes this all in stride as a civilized British citizen. He does his cackling and twisting inside himself.

The utmost in sadism comes out when Yu sentences Alex to the hospital in the wilderness of Australia. Alex is more valuable to Yu alive than dead, for the boy has healthy organs that can easily be sold on the black market. Rich people the world over will pay big money to get the organs they need, and they have no patience for being



placed on organ donor waiting lists. To Yu, this is just good business, but inside he finds great pleasure in contemplating the long, slow death that faces Alex.

Yu had underestimated Alex's abilities in a previous story, and he does so again in this one. This is the villain's big fault: He thinks he holds all the cards but actually has no hand at all. He is overconfident and ignorant of the fact that Alex far surpasses him in courage and skill. Overconfidence is often referred to as hubris, but ignorance due to overconfidence is Yu's undoing. Had he actually studied Alex rather than simply trying to eliminate him, Yu might have avoided his early death.

Ash

Ash is the tragic character in the story who pretends to be Alex's ally but is secretly setting him up to be killed. He must do this because his employer, Major Yu, has given him this order. Alex does not suspect a thing until much later in the story when he discovers the battery missing in his beacon watch, and he realizes that Ash could have done this. Alex knows for sure during the climax because he finds Ash with Yu in the oil rig control room.

Ash's problems started when he tried to become a spy but was not competent enough for the job. He botched a mission with Alex's father, and that blew the father's cover as an operative for Scorpia. Ash joins Scorpia afterward. When Major Yu orders the death of Alex's parents, he has Ash put the bomb that kills them on their plane to France. What makes his character extra tragic is his status as Alex's godfather, a role that expects Ash to protect Alex. Additionally, Ash had feelings for Alex's mother and was trusted by his father. Major Yu forced Ash to kill people he loved and who loved him, which had to have been extra enjoyable for Yu and miserable for Ash.

Jack Starbright

Jack Starbright is Alex's housekeeper and friend. He is young, attractive and always looking out for Alex's best interests. He protests the Australian mission, but Alex accepts it in order to learn about his parents from Ash.

Ethan Brook

Ethan Brook is the chief assistant of CAD (Covert Action Division of ASIS (Australian Secret Intelligence Service)) who offers Alex the mission with Ash. Brook makes it sound simple, and for now he seems innocent of any wrongdoing.

Marc Damon

Marc Damon is Brook's assistant. For the most part, he keeps quiet and hands out cards.



Ben Daniels

Ben Daniels is Alex's friend and a covert operative. He is on the rescue helicopter and is shot by Yu in the control room of the oil rig. Earlier in the story, Ben had followed Alex in Bangkok and came to his aid after he had won the fight, killing Anan Sukit just in time to save Alex's life.

Sabina Pleasure

Sabina Pleasure is Alex's girlfriend who shows up at the end of the story while Alex is home in London. While she does not have a big role in this story, the implication is that she will in the next book.

Ian Rider

Ian Rider is Alex's uncle and the man who had trained him to be a spy. He is only referenced in this story and does not otherwise appear.

Karim Hassan

Karim Hassan is the fake name that Ash takes as a refugee from Afghanistan.

Abdul Hassan

Abdul Hassan is the fake name that Alex takes as a refugee from Afghanistan.

Anan Sukit

Anan Sukit is an operative for the snakehead who takes Alex to the fight in Bangkok. He tries to shoot Alex, but the pandemonium after Alex wins the fight makes him miss. Sukit is shot in the back by an unknown ally at the time, and that turns out to have been Ben Daniels.

Mrs. Jones

Mrs. Jones is the head of British intelligence. She tells Alex about the theft of the Royal Blue bomb and has a habit of sucking on peppermints.



Smithers

Smithers is the man who invents spy gadgets for British intelligence. He made the exploding coins and beacon watch that help get Alex out of more than one jam.

Hermann de Wynter

Hermann de Wynter is the captain of the ship that takes Alex to Australia and that carries the stolen Royal Blue bomb. He fears Major Yu very much because he has seen him casually kill people.



Objects/Places

USS Kitty Hawk

The USS Kitty Hawk is the American naval vessel that picks up Alex after he falls with the space capsule into the ocean near Australia.

London

London is where Alex normally lives with his housekeeper, Jack Brightstar.

Reed and Kelly, Funeral Directors

Reed and Kelly, Funeral Directors is the building in which Scorpia meets and is located in London.

Scorpia

Scorpia is an organization of spies gone bad, and the name is derived from the words sabotage, corruption, intelligence, and assassination.

Reef Island

Reef Island is where the eight do-gooders gather for a conference and that Scorpia targets for destruction from an induced tsunami.

Bangkok 's Chinatown

Bangkok's Chinatown is where Ash and Alex start their mission of the Australians.

Chada Trading Agency

Chada Trading Agency is the name of the warehouse in which Alex fights the martial arts champion.

Jakarta, Indonesia

Jakarta, Indonesia is where Ash and Alex go to find passage to Australia on a ship.



Liberian Star

The Liberian Star is the name of the ship that takes Alex and the stolen Royal Blue bomb to Australia.

Darwin, Australia

Darwin, Australia is the port that the Liberian Star goes to with Alex and the stolen Royal Blue bomb aboard.

The Hospital

The hospital is the place where Major Yu sends Alex to die after the doctor takes all sellable organs out of Alex.

Oil Rig

The oil rig is where Yu plans to explode Royal Blue and cause the tsunami.

Royal Blue

Royal Blue is a British-made prototype conventional bomb more powerful than any to date, but not as powerful as a nuclear bomb.

Exploding Magnetic Coins

The exploding magnetic coins are spy gadgets that Alex uses to escape the shipping container, cause a big problem on the Liberian Star, and escape from the hospital.

Beacon Watch

The beacon watch is what Alex uses to call in a rescue helicopter after he escapes from the hospital and survives the rapids and waterfall.

Makeshift Kayak

The makeshift kayak is a fiberglass pontoon from a seaplane that Alex modifies for his escape from the hospital on a river that has rapids and a waterfall.



Themes

Life of a Spy

Alex's father had been a spy, and his uncle who had raised him is a spy. His uncle, Ian Rider, trained Alex from a young age in the skills required to function as an effective operative, and this is why the story exists in the first place. However, the life of a spy is portrayed in a realistic manner, or at least as realistic as the reader suspects. Rather than being all glamour and excitement, the life includes crushing loneliness that leads to taking risks with having relationships, and that hardly ever turns out well. One participant in the relationship ends up dead, and as with Alex's parents, both at once in an explosion.

Due to Alex's family being so involved, he keeps finding himself doing covert operations against his initial will. Once the action starts, he has no time to ponder any of the deeper meanings of life. He either acts or dies, and he must act quickly, oftentimes in series of cascading life-threatening situations. This part of spying is anything but comfortable and can go on only so long before dropping from exhaustion. This happens to Alex after fighting the river during his escape from the hospital. Once out of the sunk makeshift kayak, he falls asleep, and the river current brings him to a sandy beach. His is lucky that he must have drifted with his face out of the water.

Alex also does not get much time between harrowing experiences. He had just finished an impossible mission in space when the Australians offer one that, on the surface, seems easy enough. He expects to learn something about his parents from Ash, but instead his life is repeatedly threatened. There is little reason to expect this to end, due to the fact that killing one villain likely causes retaliation from another. In the last chapter, Alex seems settled back into his safe life as a student, and an old girlfriend makes contact with him. He may have an enjoyable Christmas holiday, but he may also find himself fighting for his life by the New Year's Eve celebration.

Cultural and Geographical Differences

Of special interest in this story are the cultural differences of Thailand and Indonesia. Bangkok has two worlds, the very poor and the very wealthy. Alex experiences the wealthy part in the hotel where he and Ash are disguised as refugees. Chinatown is an entirely different place where abject poverty has turned it into one big shantytown. Yet people somehow manage to survive with very little but in constant misery. Most young readers of this story will be repelled by the stench and filth, which is exactly the point. The author had visited this and many other places in Bangkok, so the images are not completely made up. In Jakarta, the only clean place that Alex experiences is the airport. The entire city looks to be terribly depressed.



In Indonesia, the special forces go through the most rigorous training imaginable and come out not much better than the criminals they fight. Ruthlessness is the norm, and yet the Indonesian military tolerates long hair on their male soldiers. This may also be the arrogance of the soldiers, defying rules simply because nobody exists who can enforce compliance. The author leaves this an open question, commenting only that the soldiers are different from British, Australian, and American.

The geography of Australia is a featured part of the story. Few non-Australians realize how diverse the ecosystems are in this continent-sized island. The rainforest to be found in the interior of the continent is where the hospital exists, and its location gives two major benefits: it is nearly impossible for the victims to escape, and clients must be flown in. Since the area is remote, the possibility of detection is low. Perhaps this little bit of information will motivate readers to find out more about Australia and the other settings.

Strange Behaviors of Adults

Ash behaves strangely around Alex, and for good reason. He is betraying the boy by bringing him into Major Yu's clutches. However, Alex dismisses the behavior as simply being an adult with issues he cannot understand. He even forgives Ash for the death of his parents, thinking that Ash carries unjustified guilt. Rather than giving the impression of a naïve young man, Alex's offer comes off as genuine concern for Ash's well being. By the end of the story, Alex learns the truth about his parents' deaths, and how justified Ash's guilt really is.

Comments about other adults carry the viewpoint of a fourteen-year-old trying to figure out adult behavior. Mrs. Jones continually sucks on peppermints, perhaps because she has quit smoking. Major Yu has an obsession with everything British, even though he is half oriental. Just beneath the civilized façade is a sadistic madman who has no concern about the collateral deaths that would result from his evil plan. The ship captain does not respond when Alex has a pistol on him and gives an order, although the reader knows that Alex's escape means an automatic death sentence for the captain. Alex deals with his situations as expected from a young man. He has not yet experienced enough to read adults very well, but he makes reasonable guesses. Until he experiences similar situations, he will need to continue guessing.



Style

Point of View

The point of view is a limited omniscient third-person narrative usually, but not always, with Alex as the focus. One of the main surprises at the end of the story is that Ash had been working for Major Yu all along, and he is responsible for the deaths of Alex's parents. Limiting the point of view to Alex is necessary to build up to the surprise. A broad omniscient point of view would have exposed Ash as an enemy right away.

The focus on Alex switches from an overview to being right inside his head. Examples of this are the fight scene in the old warehouse and when Alex drops into the polluted water afterward. This change in focus lets the reader see a big picture and close-ups, as is commonly done in movies. During the climax the focus moves from the oil rig to the motorboat in which Yu escapes, and then zooms into the last moments of his life. It is a gruesome scene as every bone in his body shatters, and he collapses into a mass not resembling a human being. This is an excellent example of dramatic presentation that punctuates a satisfying conclusion: Alex has not only won, he has killed the villain most thoroughly with Yu's own evil plan.

Setting

The setting of the story starts out within the space capsule that Alex rides in to the surface of the ocean near Australia. A United States naval vessel picks him up and delivers him to an Australian military base near Sydney. While in the city, Alex accepts a mission to help with an undercover mission that has the objective of determining where refugees are obtaining false identifications used for entering Australia. From there Alex flies a commercial airliner to Bangkok, Thailand, and meets with his partner, Ash. Disguised as refugees from Afghanistan, they go to Bangkok's Chinatown and wait for contact from the snakehead. Alex is forced to fight in a rotting old warehouse built on an island and partially over a polluted river. He escapes into the river, hijacks a ferryboat, and makes his escape. Their next stop is in Jakarta, Indonesia and another warehouse. Alex and Ash are then taken to the shipping docks, and Alex is forced to enter one of the containers. The next action takes place on the ship that is taking him to Australia. Alex discovers a bomb known as Royal Blue, escapes from the ship, and jumps into a pickup truck that takes him to a remote café outside of Darwin, Australia. After a brief stay at the house of Major Yu, Alex is then flown to a remote hospital deep within the Australian wilderness. He escapes the hospital in a makeshift kayak and manages to survive the river trip. Once Alex's friend rescues him, he joins the special forces assault team and parachutes onto an oil rig. After successfully completing this mission, Alex flies back to his home in London.

The settings change from grimy poverty to intolerable conditions within the shipping container. The ship setting is clean but dangerous, since Alex moves among his



enemies and must avoid detection. Major Yu's house is immaculate and decorated in the British style, but just beneath the surface lays a horrible fate for Alex at the remote hospital. This is also a clean place, but the purpose of the hospital is to remove Alex's organs and sell them on the black market until organ removal kills him. The river setting nearly kills him anyway, but he survives and is rescued. The oil rig setting at night is perfect for the story's climax, since it is a complex web of structures resembling a small city. This makes achieving the mission's objective difficult.

Language and Meaning

The language is kept purposefully simple, with the word choices aimed at the young adult market. Sentences are generally short with basic syntax constructions. The author emphasizes sensory impressions, especially smell and touch, while describing settings and predicaments that Alex encounters. This technique draws the reader into the story as if being alongside the hero, and the intent is to make the reader identify very closely with the protagonist.

Occasionally the author identifies the villain as evil, but mostly this is demonstrated by the antagonist's actions. The lengthy monologue that Major Yu gives about his background helps to round out the character as also being the victim of circumstances. His life had been honorable up until he contracted a serious bone disease that made him extremely frail. Nevertheless, once he turned to crime, he excelled at it.

The major point of the story is action. During such scenes, the language moves ahead quickly, giving just enough information for the reader's imagination to flesh out. This is a form of showing rather than telling, since lengthy descriptions would detract from the rapid action. A few well-placed comments give back-story as well, for example when Alex fights the river in his makeshift kayak. The back-story is that Alex had been kayaking before and had learned certain skills that he uses to survive.

Structure

The story consists of 43 chapters set into a chronological timeline. One chapter slips time backwards about 24 hours, but the rest are consistent. The timeline anomaly happens when Alex hides under Major Yu's bed and overhears important information. First the scene is presented of Yu and the ship captain talking over Alex and his formidable abilities. Then the scene goes back to when Alex decided that the best hiding place on the ship was underneath Yu's bed.

The plot follows the classic heroic adventure tale. The hero must leave a comfort zone and plunge immediately into serious danger. That danger needs to be surmounted, and with perhaps a little bit of time to catch breath, the hero must be put into an even more challenging set of problems. This pattern repeats with the danger becoming ever more impossible until the climax, in which the hero wins and triumphantly returns home. In this story, Alex also gets the girl at the end, but she was not involved at all in the rest of

the story. This implies strongly that the next book in the series will be an adventure/romance tale, with the girl possibly taking on the role of hero.



Quotes

"His lids were strange, almost metallic gray with lids that folded in on themselves."
Chapter 2, "Death is Not the End," p. 18

"Alex had to force himself, knowing that he might be making the worst mistake in his life, that seconds from now he could be crippled, in agony."
Chapter 4, No Picnic, p. 53

"The smell of sewage. That was what hit him first: thick, sweet, and heavy."
Chapter 8, First Contact, p. 108

"There were a couple of fat cockroaches crawling up the wall right next to him, but by now he had gotten used to them. They didn't bite or sting. They were just ugly."
Chapter 10, Wat Ho, p. 141

"Sometimes Alex wondered if all the airports in the world hadn't been designed by the same architect: someone with a love of shops and corridors, plate-glass windows and potted plants."
Chapter 13, Unwin Toys, p. 196

"Yu considered. Something very close to anxiety appeared in his shrunken schoolboy face."
Chapter 15, Hide-and-Seek, p. 241

"Yu raised the hand with the walking stick, then swung it with all his strength. This was the last thing that Alex remembered—a silver scorpion glinting brilliantly as it swooped toward him out of an Australian sun."
Chapter 15, Hide-and-Seek, p. 262

"He had been sent to uncover a smuggling operation, and somehow instead he had stumbled into this terrible nightmare . . . another attempt by Scorpia to change the world."
Chapter 16, Made in Britain, p. 281

"The sky was a deep gray with a streak of red like a fresh wound above the horizon."
Chapter 17, Spare Parts, p. 296



"He was so close that Alex could make out the stubble on his chin, the finger closing on the trigger."

Chapter 19, White Water, p. 324

"The island was only a quarter of a mile long, but it was strikingly beautiful with white beaches, deep green palm trees, and a turquoise sea . . . all the colors somehow too vivid to be quite real."

Chapter 21, Attack Force, p. 346

"The pulse smashed into the yacht, destroying the electric system, snuffing out the lights, ripping every fitting apart. Major Yu's bone structure wasn't strong enough to withstand it. Every single bone in his body fractured at the same time. For about two seconds, he remained vaguely human."

Chapter 22, Dragon Nine, p. 373

Topics for Discussion

What does Alex feel about his career as a spy?

What motivated Major Yu to take up a life of crime?

How does luck work into Alex's escape from the hospital?

Why does Alex's godfather, Ash, kill Alex's parents?

Describe the Scorpia organization.

What are the differences between and the similarities among the Indonesian special forces and the British or Australian special forces?

What is the significance of Royal Blue?

Why is Ash so important to Alex until the truth comes out?

What role does Jack Starbright play in Alex's life?

How does Alex explain his long absences from his school in London?