

THE BONUS STORMBREAKER CHAPTER

RTI

by Anthony Horowitz

This is the missing chapter... the one that never made it into my book, Stormbreaker.

All you need to know...

Alex Rider has been plucked out of school and sent for training with the Special forces in Wales. He has been given a code name – Cub – and the other men in his patrol are Wolf, Eagle, Snake and Fox. All of them, and in particular Wolf, resent having a boy in a man's world and the training period has been bitter and tough...

Alex woke suddenly, brutally, wrenched out of his sleep. He was aware of hands, pulling away the covers. A face in a black, balaclava mask. Two pitiless eyes gazing at him as if he were an exhibit in a museum. He opened his mouth to speak, but before he could say a word, he was jerked out of bed and into the night. It was cold outside, with a light drizzle hanging in the air. Alex was dressed only in shorts and a T-shirt. He shivered, wondering what the hell was going on.

The SAS training camp had been taken over while he slept, exhausted by the exercises of the day before. There were vehicles parked all around him, lights, men moving in and out of the shadows, the crackle of a distant radio. Alex wondered briefly what had happened to the men in his squadron but then decided he was actually much more concerned about what was going to happen to him. Two men had taken hold of him. His arms were clamped between them. He was half-carried across the yard, his feet dragging in the mud behind him. If he had been a sack of potatoes, they wouldn't have treated him less gently.

They took him into a half-derelict barn on the other side of the camp. The SAS had been based in what had once been a farm and Alex guessed that this building might have been used to store feed. It still had an earthy, slightly sour smell. But there was nothing in there now apart from a chair, a naked light bulb and a hard, cement floor. Moisture trickled down the rough, brick walls. Alex was slammed into the chair and pinned in place. Another

man appeared from nowhere. So now there were three of them, all dressed in battle fatigues and balaclavas. They surrounded him.

‘Your name,’ one of them demanded.

‘It’s Cub,’ Alex replied.

‘Your real name.’

‘I can’t give you that . . .’

‘What are you doing with the SAS? You’re a bloody schoolboy! Why are you here?’

‘I’m not allowed to tell you . . .’

A face closed in on him. Alex had never seen such ugly eyes. The mouth twisted behind the stocking mask. ‘You can tell us!’ it sneered. ‘I’m giving you permission.’

‘My name is Cub,’ Alex repeated. It was the code name he had been given when he first arrived. None of the men in the SAS used their true identities.

The eyes narrowed. Alex could see the anger and the cruelty they contained. They belonged to a man who hadn’t expected to be defied– and certainly not by a teenager.

‘You will tell us,’ he snarled. ‘Trust me on that. You’ll tell us everything we want to know before this night is over.’

A signal must have been given. Alex was pulled off the chair and manhandled out of the room, his toes scraping against the concrete. He was fully awake now and his eyes had got used to the dark so he was able to make out more details of what was happening in the camp. They had been invaded. It was as simple as that. The men were all soldiers – obviously English. But they were the enemy. Who had sent them? What exactly did they want?

There were three trucks parked to one side and – beyond them – an awkward-looking vehicle that looked like a caravan except that it was

perched high up on six, thick rubber wheels. More soldiers were moving between the buildings. As he was taken across the yard, he saw Wolf being dragged the other way. The SAS man was no friend of his. In fact, nobody had tried harder to make him feel unwelcome. But now, for a brief second, their eyes met. Alex was astonished to see that Wolf was looking scared.

The invaders carried Alex over to one of the other farm buildings and threw him inside. There was a metal door, which slammed shut behind him. He had landed on the floor, and he picked himself up slowly. That was when he saw that he wasn't alone.

The three other members of his unit – Snake, Fox and Eagle – were sitting, slumped on wooden benches. Like him, they were dressed only in their night clothes and he guessed they had also been rudely woken and pulled out of bed. Fox, the youngest of the three, had been hurt. There was a trickle of blood coming out of the corner of his mouth. His fair hair was damp and untidy. The other two men seemed to be deep in thought. Nobody was saying anything.

‘What’s happening?’ Alex asked.

There was no answer. Alex felt a spurt of annoyance.

None of the men in the unit ever spoke to him. He had begun to get used to it. But this was different.

For once they were all in the same boat – and it seemed to be sinking fast.

‘Tell me what’s going on!’ Alex demanded.

Fox glanced at Eagle, who nodded slowly. ‘RTI,’ he said, and spat.

‘RTI?’

‘RTI training. Resistance to Interrogation.’

Eagle took over. ‘They’re testing our ability to keep quiet if we’re captured by the enemy,’ he explained. ‘We tell them anything except our code names, we’re binned. We’re out of the SAS!’

‘Who are they?’ Alex asked.

‘Green Jackets.’ This time it was Snake who had answered. ‘A local unit. They hate our guts – because they know we’re the best. So they really enjoy this.’

Alex’s head swam. British soldiers attacking British soldiers . . . and it was all just another training exercise! Not for the first time, he wondered how he had managed to get caught up in all this.

‘We talk, we get thrown out,’ Snake continued. ‘And that’s exactly what they want.’

‘But it’s just an exercise,’ Alex said. ‘They can’t hurt us.’

Fox smiled and Alex saw the blood on his teeth. ‘You think I just slipped?’ he asked.

‘They can do what they like,’ Snake said. ‘One of us winds up in hospital, they can say it was just an accident.’

‘And accidents do happen!’ Eagle spat in disgust.

Ten minutes later, the door opened again and Wolf was thrown in. He landed flat on his stomach and Alex saw that his head and the upper part of his body were soaking wet. There was a bruise on the side of his cheek.

‘The pigs!’ he rasped. He lay where he was, his shoulders heaving. ‘The lousy, stinking . . .’ Slowly, he pulled himself off the floor. ‘They laid into me!’ he exclaimed, and Alex could hear the surprise in his voice. ‘They were really enjoying themselves!’

‘Did you tell them anything?’ Eagle asked.

‘Of course not.’ Wolf’s eyes settled on Alex. ‘What about you, Cub? I bet you told them. I bet you blabbed.’

‘No, I didn’t.’ Alex was angry now. Wolf had picked on him from the day he had arrived. He had never trusted him, never even given him a chance.

‘But you will . . . and you might as well know now. If you blow it, we all blow it. Because we’re a unit. It only takes one of us to talk and we’ll all be out of here.’

‘So what happens now?’ Alex asked.

‘They let us sweat it out,’ Fox said. ‘It might be an hour. It might be a few minutes. But one thing you can be sure about. They’ll come for us again . . .’

Alex ignored him. He went over to the door and examined it. The door was a solid metal sheet, fitting into a metal frame, bolted from the outside. The room itself had once been used for dipping sheep. There were a few shelves, rotten now, with some rusting canisters that might once have contained chemicals. A single barred window looked out onto the night. He glanced at it briefly, but it was obvious he wasn’t going to get out that way. He examined the floor. It was made up of heavy paving slabs, but in the middle there was a trench – square and about half a meter deep, lined with concrete. There was a circular metal plate at the far end. It reminded Alex of an oversized bath plug. Then he realized what it was. A manhole cover.

‘What’s this?’ Alex demanded.

Wolf ignored him. But Fox slowly turned his head.

‘There’s some sort of drain,’ Alex said. ‘Can you help me get the cover off?’

Wolf scowled. ‘You really think they’d bung us in here if there was a drain big enough for us to crawl out?’ he asked.

Alex examined the cover. Wolf was right. It was barely even the size of a dustbin lid. But even so . . .

‘You’re adults,’ he said simply.

Fox saw what he was thinking. The Green Jackets would have used this place before. But only for fully grown men. Alex was half their size – slim for his age. Wolf still didn’t move, but Fox and Eagle came over to the trench. Somehow, they managed to get their fingers under the heavy lid. They prised it off to reveal a narrow tunnel, running out of the room, underneath the wall. Alex looked down, already wishing he hadn’t suggested

this. The tunnel was pitch black and slimy from recent rain. It might run a hundred meters before it surfaced. It might not surface at all.

‘You think you can get through that?’ Fox asked.

Alex nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

‘Here!’ Snake had produced a small torch. He flicked it on. ‘You’re lucky. I always sleep with this in my pocket,’ he said.

‘Yeah,’ Alex nodded. ‘This really is my lucky night.’

He knelt down beside the opening. He could already smell the chemicals rising up out of the mud. He wondered how long it had been since the sheep dip had last been used. Could he really do this? For a moment, he doubted himself.

Then Wolf spoke. ‘Good luck,’ he said. It was the first two words he had ever addressed to Alex that weren’t a jibe or an insult.

That decided him. Alex wriggled forwards on his stomach and entered the tunnel.

It was pitch black. But for Snake’s torch, he wouldn’t have had the courage even to begin. Alex was squeezing himself into a circular opening that was hardly bigger than his shoulders. He knew that he was only a few meters underground, but even so, he felt as if he was buried alive and had to force himself to breathe evenly, not to panic. The floor of the tunnel was wet and slippery . . . at least that helped him a little, making it easier for him to slide himself along. But the stink of ancient chemicals made him sick. The torch was clamped between his teeth and he could feel the bile rising in his throat. He wanted to scream. He wished he had never volunteered.

He willed himself on. The beam of the torch showed that the tunnel continued straight, then came to a sudden halt. A nasty thought suddenly sprang into Alex’s mind. If he came to a dead end, would he be able to maneuver himself backwards again? At least Snake and the others knew he was there. If he didn’t reappear soon, they would raise the alarm. And hopefully someone would reach him before he passed out and suffocated in the cold slime and the darkness.

He came to the end and twisted his head round, trying to look up. It seemed that the roof was solid. Somehow he managed to get his hand above his head and felt a hard metal surface. A second manhole cover? He pushed. Nothing happened. Alex swore silently through gritted teeth. He had come all this way for nothing. The exit was sealed. But then he remembered Fox and Eagle, prising off the first lid. It had been heavy, even for two men. He put his hand flat against the metal and pushed again. This time there was a little movement. He pressed upwards with all his strength and was rewarded by a grating sound as the second manhole cover came free. Delicious night air flooded in through a crack and he saw the glimmer of moonlight. He dropped the torch, letting it disappear into the darkness. If there was anyone up there on the surface, he didn't want to advertise that he was on the way. Using both hands now, he slid the cover far enough back to create a crescent-shaped doorway to freedom. He waited a few seconds, listening out for the sound of approaching footsteps, then pulled himself through. His head came up in the middle of the courtyard. There was nobody in sight. Filthy and gasping, Alex emerged into the night air, then squatted down, searching for any sign of movement. He was still dressed only in the T-shirt and shorts. The material was soaked through. Dark green slime oozed down his legs. He caught his breath. He must look like a nightmare! The creature from the black lagoon . . .

He took his bearings. The building where the SAS men were being held was right in front of him, but he could see at once that getting them out wouldn't be as easy as he had hoped. The door wasn't just bolted. There was a big padlock on it – and even if Alex managed to break it open, he'd make too much noise. They'd all be captured again before they had time to move.

The half-ruined barn where he had been interrogated was on the other side, some distance away. It seemed to be empty, but at the moment there was nobody left to interrogate. Now his attention was drawn to the vehicle that he had noticed when he had been dragged over to the cell. It was parked on a slope, about twenty meters away: a rectangular green box perched high up on thick rubber wheels. It had reminded him before of a caravan. Certainly it had windows. And there were lights coming from inside. But looking at it again, he saw that it was more like a portakabin or even a tank. It was an ugly thing. Only the army could have dreamed up something like it.

In fact the vehicle was an S-250 Grass Shelter, standard army issue. The GRASS stood for Gichner, Relocatable Accommodations Shelter System and it was being used as a temporary base by the men who had grabbed Alex and his unit. On an impulse, he hurried over to it, crouching low, still afraid of being seen. But for the moment he was safe. The men inside were too high up. Even if they had chanced to glance out of the windows, they would have looked across the courtyard, well above his head.

One of the windows was open. He heard voices coming from inside.

‘Let’s get back to them, then!’

‘Finish your tea. We’ve got all night.’ Alex recognized the second voice. It belonged to the man who had threatened him. ‘I’m really going to enjoy this . . .’

‘Let’s use the bath,’ a third voice said. ‘Fill it up with freezing water and try half-drowning them.’

‘What about the kid?’ This was the first voice again. ‘I say we start with the kid. He’ll be easy to break.’

‘Yeah . . . break his neck!’ someone said, and they all laughed.

Alex knew he didn’t have much time. He quickly examined the Grass Shelter, the fat tires, resting on chocks. The brake lever at the back . . .

The idea came to him instantly.

Getting the chocks out was easier than he had thought it would be, but there was a complicated lock system on the brake that took him a few precious moments to work out. A lever with a button, a pin holding everything in place. He slid the pin out, but the button was so stiff that he had to use both hands, and all his strength, to force it down. There was a loud click. He had released the lever and he gently lowered it. The brake was off – but the Grass shelter didn’t move. Alex rested a shoulder against the back and pushed. He was lucky. The soldiers must have parked in a hurry. The slope was fairly steep. It only took a little effort and the wheels began to turn.

There were six Green Jackets inside the shelter. Snake had been right about them. Three of them had once been rejected by the SAS and so they hated anyone who had been allowed to join. The other three just hated everyone. All of them had been happy to volunteer for RTI training. In fact, every year, there was quite a queue to see who would get the privilege.

Now, one of them looked out of the window. ‘Boss . . .’ he muttered.

The man he was talking to was huge with a shaven head, small eyes and two gold-capped teeth. “What is it?” he demanded.

‘Are we moving?’ the first man asked.

The Grass Shelter was indeed moving. It was already rolling down the hill and it was picking up speed all the time. As Alex watched, it bounced through the long grass and smashed into a hedge. There was the sound of branches scratching against metal – but there was no way the hedge could hold back anything so big. It continued through and – moving faster than ever – disappeared into the night.

Inside the shelter, the Green Jackets were scrambling for the door. Hot tea was splashing all around them. Mugs had rolled off the table and smashed. Magazines and briefing documents were scattering. The shaven-headed man managed to grab onto the handle . . .

. . . just as the Grass Shelter catapulted off the edge of a cliff.

The SAS camp was in the Brecon Beacons. Mountains and cliffs had all played their part in the training. In a way, the Green Jackets were lucky. They were only a hundred and fifty meters up in the air and there was a lake – ice cold and black – waiting to break their fall. The result of Alex’s work would be two broken legs, a broken collarbone, eleven cracked ribs and a severe concussion. But nobody would actually be killed.

Meanwhile, Alex had already turned his attention to the dipping shed. He found a piece of metal and used it to snap open the padlock, then dropped it and opened the door.

Wolf was the first out. He took a look round the deserted farm. Then he turned his eyes back to Alex.

‘Where is everyone?’ he demanded.

Alex shrugged. ‘I think they’ve sloped off,’ he said.

Based on the Alex Rider TM books
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