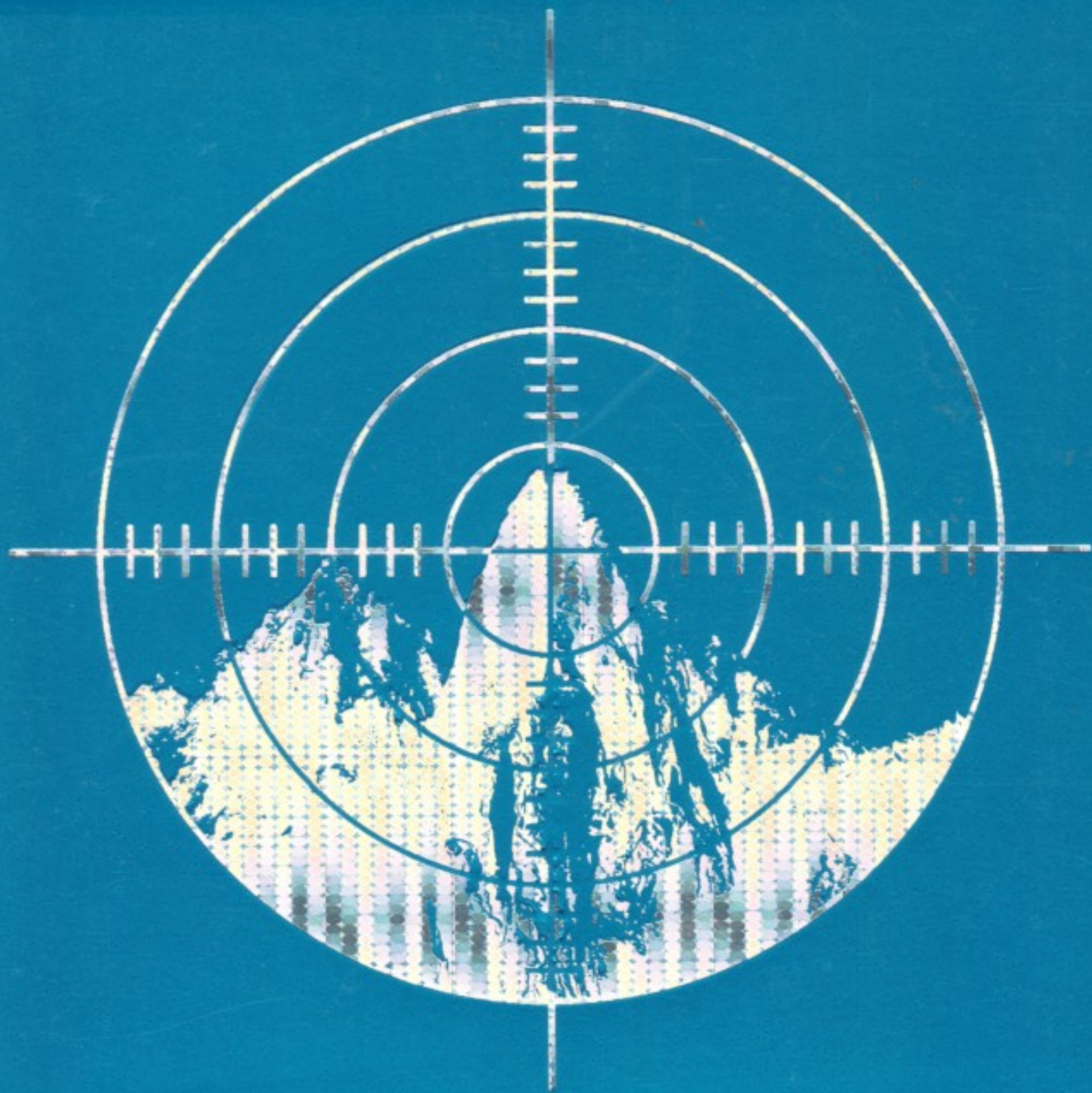


ALEX RIDER



POINT BLANK

ANTHONY HOROWITZ

New York Times *best-selling author*

1

GOING DOWN

MICHAEL J. ROSCOE was a careful man.

The car that drove him to work at quarter past seven each morning was a custom-made Mercedes with reinforced steel plates and bulletproof windows. His driver, a retired FBI agent, carried a Beretta subcompact automatic pistol and knew how to use it. There were just five steps from the point where the car stopped to the entrance of Roscoe Tower on New York's Fifth Avenue, but closed-circuit television cameras followed him every inch of the way. Once the automatic doors had slid shut behind him, a uniformed guard—also armed—watched as he crossed the foyer and entered his own private elevator.

The elevator had white marble walls, a blue carpet, a silver handrail, and no buttons. Roscoe pressed his hand against a small glass panel. A sensor read his fingerprints, verified them, and activated the elevator. The doors slid shut and the elevator rose to the

sixtieth floor without stopping. Nobody else ever used it. Nor did it ever stop at any of the other floors in the building. At the same time it was traveling up, the receptionist in the lobby was on the telephone, letting his staff know that Mr. Roscoe was on his way.

Everyone who worked in Roscoe's private office had been handpicked and thoroughly vetted. It was impossible to see him without an appointment. Getting an appointment could take three months.

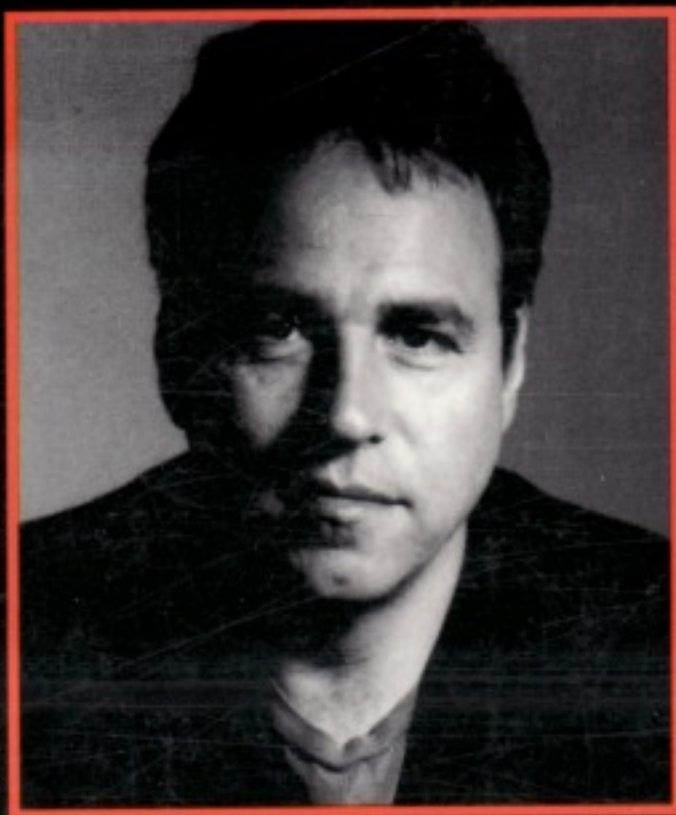
When you're rich, you have to be careful. There are cranks, kidnappers, terrorists—the desperate and the dispossessed. Michael J. Roscoe was the chairman of Roscoe Electronics and the ninth or tenth richest man in the world—and he was very careful indeed. Ever since his face had appeared on the front cover of *Time* magazine ("The Electronics King"), he knew that he had become a visible target. When in public he walked quickly, with his head bent. His glasses had been chosen to hide as much as possible of his round, handsome face. His suits were expensive but anonymous. If he went to the theater or to dinner, he always arrived at the last minute, preferring not to hang around. There were dozens of different security systems in his life, and although they had once annoyed him, he had allowed them to become routine.

But ask any spy or security agent. Routine is the one thing that can get you killed. It tells the enemy where you're going and when you're going to be there. Routine was going to kill Michael J. Roscoe, and this was the day death had chosen to come calling.

Of course, Roscoe had no idea of this as he stepped out of the elevator that opened directly into his private office, a huge room occupying the corner of the building with floor-to-ceiling windows giving views in two directions: Fifth Avenue to the east, Central Park just a few blocks north. The two remaining walls contained a door, a low bookshelf, and a single oil painting—a vase of flowers by Vincent van Gogh.

The black glass surface of his desk was equally uncluttered: a computer, a leather notebook, a telephone, and a framed photograph of a fourteen-year-old boy. As he took off his jacket and sat down, Roscoe found himself looking at the picture of the boy. Blond hair, blue eyes, and freckles. Paul Roscoe looked remarkably like his father had thirty years ago. Michael Roscoe was now fifty-two and beginning to show his age despite his year-round tan. His son was almost as tall as he was. The picture had been taken the summer before, on Long Island. They had spent

Author photo by Des Willie



TRAPPED!

When an investigation into a series of mysterious deaths leads agents to an elite prep school for rebellious kids, MI6 assigns Alex Rider, fourteen-year-old reluctant spy, to the case. Before he knows it, Alex is stuck in a remote boarding school high atop the Swiss Alps with the sons of the rich and powerful, and something feels wrong. Very wrong. These former juvenile delinquents have turned well-behaved, studious—and identical—overnight. It's up to Alex to find out who is masterminding this evil plot, before they find him. The clock is ticking—is Alex's luck about to run out?

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Scorpia

Ark Angel

The Falcon's Malteser

Public Enemy Number Two

Three of Diamonds

South by Southeast

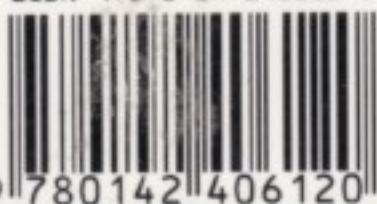
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