

## Magpie Murders Discussion Questions

by Anthony Horowitz

### Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Anthony Horowitz website)

Anthony Horowitz is the author of the bestselling teen spy series, Alex Rider. He is also responsible for creating and writing some of the UK's successful TV series, including *Midsomer Murders* and *Foyle's War*.



He has also written two Sherlock Holmes novels, *The House of Silk* and *Moriarty*; a James Bond novel, *Trigger Mortis*; and his most recent stand-alone novel, *Magpie Murders*, was a Sunday Times bestseller.

Genres: Young Adult Fiction, Children's Fiction, Mystery, Historical Mystery, Thriller

### Characters:

#### Characters in "Real Life"

- **Susan Ryeland** – Head of fiction at Cloverleaf Books. Alan Conway's book editor. She discovered Conway as a writer. Liked the character Pund. Did not like Conway as a person. Her boyfriend is Andres and her sister is Kate.
- **Alan Conway** – Author of *Magpie Murders*. Cloverleaf's biggest author. Currently writes the successful Atticus Pund series. Former teacher who really only wanted to be a "Writer's writer and produce Literature" which Pund is not. Divorced with a son. His most recent lover was James Taylor.
- **Charles Clover** – Owner of Cloverleaf books. Married to Elaine with 2 grown children. Grandchild on the way. Works directly with Conway.
- **Andres** – Susan's boyfriend. (52). Greek who is living in England to teach at Westminster School. Divorced. Two teenage sons. Wants to move back to Crete to open a hotel.
- **Claire Jenkins** – Alan's sister. Works at the police station. Widowed. She helped Conway with fan mail. She also typed up his novels and helped research many of his books. They had a falling out over her being paid for her work.
- **Katie** – Susan's sister. Former schoolteacher who worked with Conway and Andres at Westminster. Has 2 kids and husband.
- **Donald Leigh** – Scottish waiter at the Ivy where Conway and Clover had lunch. Leigh says Conway stole the plot for a book from Leigh at a writer's workshop Conway was teaching.
- **Detective Superintendent Locke** – Investigating Conway's death.
- **Melissa** – Conways ex-wife. Remarried. Talked Conway into writing mysteries to get published.
- **Matthew Prichard** – Grandson of Agatha Christie.
- **Mark Redmond** – Owns Red herring Productions, the TV and film producer who had optioned rights to Atticus Pund.
- **James Taylor** – Conway's former lover. Had been with Conway for years.

### Characters in “*Magpie Murders*”

- **Atticus Pund** – German Jew living in England. (65) Private investigator and consultant for police. Has a terminal tumor. Was in a concentration camp in WWII.
- **Mary Elizabeth Blakiston** – Housekeeper at Pye Manor. Breaks her neck falling down the stairs at the manor. Busybody.
- **Matthew Blakiston** – Mary’s estranged husband. Left when Robert was 12 and his other son, Tom drowned. Currently living in Cardiff.
- **Robert Blakiston** – Mechanic. Mary’s son. Has a fiancé, Joy. Had an argument with mother right before her death.
- **Brent – Neville Jay Brent** – Groundsman at Pye. Found Blakiston at bottom of stairs. Grew up at Pye. Brent has no social skills. Was asked to leave his job at Pye and given a month’s notice.
- **Detective Inspector Raymond Chubb** – Officer investigating Pye’s murder.
- **Jack Dartford** – “Friends” with Frances Pye. Handsome London man.
- **James Fraser** – Pund’s assistant, private secretary, and driver.
- **Jemima Humphries** – Charles Clover’s personal assistant at Cloverleaf. Was fired/left days before the murder.
- **Reverend Robin Osborne** – Pastor who gives sermon at Blakiston’s funeral. Rides a squeaky bicycle. His wife is Henrietta.
- **Clarissa Pye** – Magnus Pye’s twin sister. Became a governess and then teacher to support herself.
- **Mangus Pye** – Baronette. Owner of Pie Manor. Sister is Clarissa. Wife, Frances, was an actress before she married Mangus. Has a teenaged son, Freddy. Decapitated with a sword.
- **Dr. Emilia Redwing** – Village doctor. Friends with Mary Blakiston. Married to artist/painter, Arthur. Took over practice from her father, Edgar.
- **Joy Sanderling** – Nurse and receptionist for Dr. Redwing. Robert Blakiston’s fiancé. Reaches out to Pund to help Robert with/about his mother’s death.
- **Johnny Whitehead** – Owns an antique shop in village. Wife is Gemma.

### Other information:

- **Abbey Grange** – Conway’s manor house. Has a tower where Conway liked to breakfast. Was once known as Ridgeway Hall, but Conway renamed it Abbey Grange after a Sherlock Holmes story.
- **Dingle Dell** – Meadow and forested area between Pye Manor and vicarage.
- **Pye Hall** – Manor house owned by Sir Magnus Pye. Was once a nunnery and is now a country manor.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. What do you think the title, "Magpie Murders?"
3. What did you think about the book in a book concept?
4. The author states that with this book, you're given a box of tricks and that "The motive for the murder, and therefore by extension, the identity of the killer, can be found on page 1." Were you able to see this?
5. Horowitz has a talent for creating characters who although are real enough to step out of the page, are also often incredibly unlikable. Were you able to connect with the characters?
6. With this book we're given two mysteries to solve. The suspects in Alan Conway's murder were the same people Alan wrote about in *Magpie Murders* because they were all people in his real life. How well do you think this worked?
7. Do you think all writers put people they know in books or was it unusual for Alan Conway to do so?
8. Did Alan Conway steal his plots from others? If he did, is that wrong? If the plot is never going to see the light of day due to bad writing, is it really stealing?
9. In *Magpie Murders*, the story, why do you think the poison, Physostigmine, was taken? To commit murder? Suicide? Some other reason?
10. When Clarissa finds out she is actually the older twin, she is told, "You might be better off just accepting things as they are. You are well known and respected in the village." What would you do in her situation – fight it or let it go?
11. Pund says that Matthew Blakiston killed his wife. Why do you think he said that? Did he kill her? How?
12. One of Alan Conway's biggest concerns is that he is writing popular mysteries, not "Literature". How bound is an author to the successes of their past writing endeavors by the public – their publisher, the media, their readers? Can an author break from their genre mold? How does their success impact their vision and personal integrity as literary artist and creator?
13. Did you figure out who killed Alan Conway? Mary Blakiston? Magnus Pye?
14. Were you satisfied with the ending of the story? If you could change it, what would you do to make it better?
15. At one point the book says, "Why do we have such a need for murder mysteries and what is it that attracts us – the crime? The solution? A private need for bloodshed?" What do you think?
16. Does knowing that an author has done bad things in their personal life diminish his/her work? Does it make you like the work less?
17. *Magpie Murders* was supposed to be a homage to classic crime/mystery novels. Do you think it succeeds?
18. Horowitz has written a number of other books – for many different age ranges and genres. Will you read any of them?

## References:

- Book Companion – [https://www.bookcompanion.com/magpiem\\_links2.html](https://www.bookcompanion.com/magpiem_links2.html)
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/h/anthony-horowitz/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/32075854-magpie-murders>
- Anthony Horowitz – <https://www.anthonhorowitz.com/>
- Novel Gobblers – <https://novelgobblers.com/magpie-murders-by-anthony-horowitz/>
- Novelist – <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=7832ed4e-83ab-4ad7-9969-b89267b06eb4%40sdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10560333&db=neh>

---

## Anthony Horowitz Books

### Series

#### Pentagram

1. The Devil's Door-Bell (1983)
2. The Night of the Scorpion (1985)
3. The Silver Citadel (1986)
4. Day of the Dragon (1989)

#### Diamond Brothers

1. The Falcon's Malteser (1986) aka Just Ask for Diamond
2. Public Enemy Number Two (1987)
3. South by South East (1991)
4. The French Confection (2003)
5. The Blurred Man (2003)
6. I Know What You Did Last Wednesday (2003)
7. Greek Who Stole Christmas (2007)
  - Three of Diamonds (2003)
  - Four of Diamonds (2012)
  - Two of Diamonds (2013)

#### Groosham Grange

1. Groosham Grange (1988)
2. The Unholy Grail (1990)

#### Alex Rider

1. Stormbreaker (2000)
2. Point Blanc (2001) aka Point Blank
- 2.5. Quite a Ride (2010)
3. Skeleton Key (2002)
- 3.5. Secret Weapon (2019)
4. Eagle Strike (2003)
5. Scorpia (2004)
6. Ark Angel (2005)
7. Snakehead (2007)
8. Crocodile Tears (2009)
9. Scorpia Rising (2011)
10. Russian Roulette (2013)
11. Never Say Die (2017)
12. Nightshade (2020)
  - The Gadgets (2005)
  - The Mission Files (2008)

#### Pocket Horowitz

- Burnt (2002)
- Killer Camera (2002)
- Night Bus (2002)
- The Phone Goes Dead (2002)
  - Scared (2002)
- Twist Cottage (2002)

## **Power of Five / Gatekeepers**

1. Raven's Gate (2005)
2. Evil Star (2006)
3. Nightrise (2007)
4. Necropolis (2008)
5. Oblivion (2012)

## **Alex Rider - Graphic Novel**

1. Stormbreaker Graphic Novel (2006)
2. Point Blanc Graphic Novel (2007)
3. Skeleton Key Graphic Novel (2009)
4. Eagle Strike Graphic Novel (2012)
5. Scorpia Graphic Novel (2016)

## **Legends**

1. Battles and Quests (2010)
2. Beasts and Monsters (2010)
3. Heroes and Villains (2011)
4. Death and the Underworld (2011)
5. Tricks and Transformations (2012)
6. The Wrath of the Gods (2012)

## **Stand Alone Novels**

- The Sinister Secret of Frederick K. Bower (1979) aka Enter Frederick K Bower
  - Misha, the Magician and the Mysterious Amulet (1981)
    - Adventurer (1987)
  - New Adventures of William Tell (1989)
    - Granny (1994)
    - The Switch (1996)
  - The Devil and His Boy (1998)
    - Mindgame (2001)
    - The Killing Joke (2004)
    - Magpie Murders (2016)

## **Sherlock Holmes**

*continued from series by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*

1. The House of Silk (2011)
- 1.5. The Three Monarchs (2014)
2. Moriarty (2014)

## **Power of Five: The Graphic Novel**

(with Tony Lee)

1. Raven's Gate: Graphic Novel (2013)
2. Evil star: Graphic Novel (2013)
3. Nightrise: Graphic Novel (2014)

## **Detective Daniel Hawthorne**

1. The Word is Murder (2017)
2. The Sentence is Death (2018)

---

If you liked **Magpie Murders**, try...

- [Noir](#) – Coover, Robert
- [The Nobodies Album](#) – Parkhurst, Carolyn
- [Miss Me When I'm Gone](#) – Arsenault, Emily
- [Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie](#) – Bradley, C. Alan
- [Dear Mr. M](#) – Herman Koch

---

**One for Sorrow ~ The Magpie Poem**

1 for Sorrow.

2 for Joy.

3 for a Girl.

4 for a Boy.

5 for Silver.

6 for Gold.

7 for a Secret. Never Been Told.



Pixabay.com – Magpie – by MabelAmber