'This is a fantastic, phenomenal, funny adventure!' **Rhys, age 9, Lansdowne Primary School, Cardiff**

'Lightmare on Cherry Tree Lane! This was electrifyingly zumbatastic!' **Noah, 8 years, Springwood Heath Primary, Liverpool**

'Funny characters, brilliant animal agents and weird superpowers – *Alex Sparrow and the Zumbie Apocalypse* is awesome!' **William Murray, age 9**

'Alex and Jess are back in their funniest and most exciting adventure yet – a twisting, turning, festive thrill ride from start to finish!' **Matthew Girvan (class teacher) Sycamore Class, Roydon Primary Academy, Essex**

'A super story with great characters and zumbies – awesome!' **Christine Iloabuchi, age 9**

'If you love Alex Sparrow, you need to read this book!' **William Thompson, age 9**

'A zum-tacular story full of drama, excitement and humour. I loved it!' **Ayse Halil, age 9**

‘There were so many funny bits and scary bits. I loved this story, it is the best Alex Sparrow book yet!’ **Charlotte, age 9, Cumbria**

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‘Hilarious page-turning adventure from start to finish. Best book I’ve ever read! Had me chuckling throughout. So suspenseful, it had me frozen on the spot. I’m like a zombie, I need more of this book!’ **Ava, 11 years (Northants)**

‘Our mums do Zumba … is this what happens there?! We love how the book puts together the real world and the made-up one. It made us burst with laughter (crying laughing face emoji) and everyone needs to read all about Alex’s adventures ASAP!!!’ **Class Y4K – Wath C of E Primary School, Wath upon Dearne, Rotherham**

Jennifer Killick always wanted to be a writer, but really started when she applied for a Creative Writing MA at Brunel University, which is where she got the idea for her first book *Alex Sparrow and the Really Big Stink*. Since then she has gone on to write many books, including two more in the Alex Sparrow series; *Mo Lottie and the Junkers*; Bookbuzz bestseller *Crater Lake* and sequel *Crater lake Evolution* as well as the *Dread Wood* series. Jennifer lives in Uxbridge, in a house full of children and animals.

JENNIFER KILLICK

ALEX SPARROW AND THE ZUMBIE APOCALYPSE



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For Mum, Dad, Julie and David – thank you
for a lifetime of Christmas memories.



1

THE VERY SURPRISING FUNERAL

'Alex, switch it off!' Jess hissed at me as another searing fart bubbled in my ear. 'We've only been here ten minutes and people are already desperate to get away from us. Look how far they've all shuffled.'

I inspected the widening gap between us and the other people on our bench. 'It's no bad thing, Jessticles. They're all squashed together and we have stretching room – look.'

I swung my arms around as if I was doing an

agent warm-up exercise (as recommended before undertaking any mission in the Awesome Agent Alex Academy handbook), accidentally bumping the shoulder of the lady in front of me and making her drop her sucky sweets, which scattered all over the floor. Jess huffed and folded her arms.

I'd never been to a funeral before and hadn't especially wanted to, but Mum said I was old enough to 'pay my respects', whatever the heck that means, to Mrs Spires from next-door-but-one because she gave me twenty pence once when I pulled all the stinging nettles out of her garden for her. It was the worst job ever. It was super-hot and I got stung a gazillion times, so probably worth at least two pounds. But I got twenty pence and a glass of warm tap water.

Anyway, she died last week, something to do with her heart, Mum said. It was sad, and Mum and Nanny Sparrow were upset because they went to Zumba class with her and it happened right in front of them. So I saw why they would want to go to the funeral, but I didn't see why I had to. It was mostly full of old people, lots of them crying, and it made me uncomfortable. I'd suffered enough with the stinging nettles.

'She was a kind-hearted lady who would do anything for anyone.' A man in a suit was standing at the front, reading from a bit of paper. My ear farted again, as it does every time someone tells a lie. Thanks to The Professor (aka Miss Fortress), who gave me my rather smelly superpower, I'm a sort of human lie-detector! I held in a snigger as the stink poured out.

'Alex!' Jess glared at me.

We were in a big room with rows of benches and a pathway down the middle, leading from the door to the front, like someone was about to get married. At the front was a platform with a table on it, covered in candles and flowers. Actually, that was kind of like a wedding, too. Why do they do weddings and funerals the same? That makes no sense at all. I'm pretty certain I'll never have a wedding, but if I ever have a funeral, I want it to be dark, with everyone holding a lightsaber in an imperial salute, and my coffin being carried up the pathway to Darth Vader's music.

'Why are you humming?' Jess hissed.

'I'm not humming, I'm sound-tracking. When our story is made into a movie, and it *will* be made into a movie, we need to make sure we have all the

important things covered.' In the last three months, me and Jess had both got weird superpowers, learned how to use them, stopped an evil teacher at our school, taken down a lab that was doing illegal tests on animals, and avoided being destroyed by our nemesis, Montgomery McMonaghan. If anyone deserved a movie being made about them, it was me. And Jess, I suppose.

'And what are the important things?'

'I'm glad you asked that, Jessticles. I have a list.'

'Of course you do,' Jess sighed.

'If a movie is going to be properly awesome, it needs the following things: number one, zombies.'

'So that's out straight away,' Jess said. 'What else?'

'Number two, sick soundtrack. Number three, cool gadgets. Number four, epic chase scene.'

'Right.' Jess rolled her eyes.

'Number five, plot twist. Number six, heart-warming moment. Number seven, a shark and-slash-or an octopus. And number eight, the ultimate death through sacrifice.'

'We literally have none of those things.'

'We have none of those things *yet*,' I said. 'Patience, Jessticles.'

'Cos we're going to somehow come across a zombie and an octopus,' Jess said.

'Shush.' The old lady in front of us turned around and glared.

'Yeah, shush, Jess – this is a funeral,' I said.

Mrs Spires' coffin was white, and there was a dome of red and white flowers on top.

'Why is there a photo of a random woman next to Mrs Spires' coffin?' I whispered.

'That's Mrs Spires, idiot.'

'It never is.'

'Of course it is. Who else would it be? Beyoncé?'

I leaned forward to get a better look, but we were too far away. Mum and Nanny Sparrow were sitting towards the front of the room, but I convinced them that me and Jess should sit at the back, in case it got too much for us. Really it was just so we could chat and because I didn't want to sit with Mum and Nanny. They're so embarrassing. Mum was going to say no, but Nanny butted in and said, 'Good idea, Alex. Sometimes one needs a breath of air at a time like this.'

I nodded wisely, in the manner of someone

much maturer than their age, even though I thought it was stupid.

'Why do people say to get a "breath of air"?' I whispered to Jess. 'What else are you going to breathe? Ketchup?'

'Right now, all I'm breathing is your stink,' she said. 'Switch your lie-detector off or the rest of the funeral is going to be unbearable.'

'It's not my fault everyone's pretending Mrs Spires was nice when she wasn't.'

'But it's disrespectful to be making that awful smell at her funeral. She wasn't *that* bad.'

My ear farted again and I sniggered.

'Liar, liar, pants on fire,' I said.

Jess's cheeks turned pink. She never usually lies about anything.

'All those times you walked Snuffles for her,' I said. (Snuffles was Mrs Spires' dog.) 'In the rain, in the snow, when you had loads of homework, when you had a cold. And how did she show her gratitude?'

'She cooked me dinner once when my mum was stuck at work,' Jess said.

'And what did she cook you?'

Jess wriggled in her seat. Unfolded and re-folded her arms. Bit her lip, sighed and said, 'Liver.'

'She knew you were a vegan, did she not?'

'Yes,' Jess said.

'And what were her thoughts on that, hmmm?'

'She said to stop being so silly and eat what she'd made me, or she'd tell my mum that I was an ungrateful child.'

'How did that make you feel?'

Jess made a face. 'OK, fine, so I didn't like her,' she said, her voice a little louder but drowned out to everyone except me by the song they were all singing really, *really* badly. 'But just because she was horrid doesn't mean I'm glad she's dead.'

Unfortunately for Jess, the song ended at the exact moment she said the last part of that sentence – the 'I'm glad she's dead' part.

A bunch of heads turned round to give her the most disgusted looks I've ever seen. And I've seen a lot of disgusted looks. People tutted and shook their heads, the feathers and weird fishing-net stuff wobbling on their hats. Jess slid down in her seat, her face red like the fiery sun.

There was only one thing I could do. I stuffed my hat in my mouth and bit on it hard to stop myself from laughing.

'Shut up,' she said.

'Let us take a moment to reflect in silence on what Rose meant to us,' the head funeral guy said, and everyone looked at the floor. The room was deathly quiet. Ooh – deathly quiet – get it? I was just about to lean over to whisper my pun to Jess. I was working very hard on puns because all good agents, especially the ones in movies, can wordplay as well as extract important information from criminals and cage fight with gorillas. But I was distracted by a knocking sound.

At first I thought I had imagined it. It was muffled and distant and nobody else seemed to have noticed. But then it came again – tap, tap, tap. People started to look up from their silent reflection and glance around. The knocking became louder and it was definitely coming from the front of the room.

'What is that?' Jess said.

'I think someone's trying to beatbox,' I said.

'Maybe someone forgot to put their phone on silent,' said Jess, completely ignoring my suggestion, as if it was ridiculous.

'Lame ringtone,' I snorted. Mine was 'Duel of the Fates' from *Star Wars*. Every time my phone went off, I got to pretend I was Darth Maul

fighting Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon Jinn with my bad-A double-ended lightsaber.

'Turn it off!' someone shouted. 'Whose is it?'

'It's coming from the front!' someone else called, and people started looking towards where Mum and Nanny Sparrow were sitting. Mum was rummaging in her bag in case it was hers, even though she knew it wasn't because she has the boring ring-ring ringtone.

The funeral boss put his hands up. 'Could the owner of the phone please silence it?' he said. 'This is a funeral.'

Then the knocking was joined by a wailing noise. It sounded like someone was shouting from far away.

'What the devil is that?' a man in front of us said, and then everyone started talking crossly.

'For goodness' sake, shush.' Nanny Sparrow stood up and glared round at everyone. 'Let's just listen so we can get to the bottom of this, shall we?'

Everyone fell silent – Nanny Sparrow is not someone to be messed with.

There was a moment of nothing, and then the knocking began again, louder and quicker, and definitely with a voice. We all strained to hear.

'Must be a ghost,' I said. 'Or a zombie.'

'Don't be stupid, Alex.'

'What's it saying?' said the man who had read out the speech of lies about Mrs Spires.

The funeral boss guy took a step nearer to the coffin and looked at it in horror. We all watched as he took another step towards it. 'I … I think it's coming from here,' he said.

'Absurd!' someone shouted. 'What is this nonsense? Call this a funeral?'

Funeral boss looked scared.

'Put your ear to the coffin,' I shouted in my best attempt at an old lady voice, which I thought was very authentic.

Jess nudged me hard in the ribs.

'Yes, put your ear to it, man. We need to know what's going on here,' Nanny joined in. Everyone else was shouting in agreement.

Funeral boss was shaking as he edged towards the coffin, like it was going to come to life and eat him. He leant over and put his ear to it. Silence. And then a distant, but definite, wailing noise.

The guy jumped back in absolute horror. 'It's coming from inside the coffin,' he said, his eyes wide and sweat gleaming on his forehead.

'It can't be, Paul,' another man charged over from the corner. 'Let me have a go.'

Paul stood to one side, pulling at his tie, and the second guy put his ear to the coffin. There was a knock so loud and hard that the weird dome of flowers actually moved. The second guy whispered something to Paul.

'What on earth is going on?' Nanny Sparrow shouted.

Paul turned to the audience. 'Please accept my apologies, but we're going to have a short intermission while we complete some, err, last-minute checks.'

Everyone stood up and started to shout. I wished I was nearer the front so I could get a better look. It was all Mum and Nanny Sparrow's fault that I was stuck back here away from the action – any responsible adult would have forced me to sit with them, in case I got upset.

Paul pressed some hidden button and two thick blue curtains, like they have at the cinema, moved along a rail towards each other to block off the platform.

'Unfair,' I said. 'I think they're going to open the coffin.'

'Grow up, Alex. Do you really want to see a dead body?' Jess stood up next to me, trying a bit too hard not to look towards the curtains.

'It's not a dead body, Jessticles. Dead bodies can't knock on lids, or make weird noises with their mouths. Unless…'

'Don't even say it, Alex. Just, don't.'

'Zombie,' I said. 'Mrs Spires is a zombie.'

'That's impossible,' Jess huffed.

'Yeah, but we've seen quite a lot of the impossible lately, haven't we?' I said. 'Loads of things that couldn't happen in real life, but that *are* happening in real life. Our superpowers. Blueberried children. Warlord cats. Guinea pigs who can text.' Since our teacher Miss Fortress had given us our powers, we'd faced a bunch of the weirdest, most dangerous situations ever.

'Everyone please leave the chapel by the closest exit,' Paul was shouting above the excited chatter. 'As a matter of urgency.'

A couple of other funeral people started directing everyone towards the doors and, though I didn't want to leave, Jess and me were sucked up by the herd. I could hear the drone of an electric drill whirring behind the curtain.

'They're opening it!' I said.

'Oh flip, they actually are.' Jess looked back over her shoulder, but all we could see were the velvet curtains of blindness and concealment.

Everyone was crushing together. There were strange smells around me that I couldn't label, other than to say there were odours of flowers, soup and cardigans in there.

'Ugh, I wish people would stop squashing together,' Jess said, as she got whacked in the face with a handbag.

'Me too, I need a breath of air,' I said. 'Hang on … Mrs Spires was a friendly and generous person.' I said that last bit loudly.

People turned to smile at me, but their expressions quickly changed as they smelt the stink my lie had created. They scowled at Jess and pushed away from us.

'Oh no, they think it was me!' Jess said.

'It's because you're so disrespectful at funerals,' I sighed. 'Now let's get outside and talk zombies.'

We finally made it out into the freezing air.

'She's not a zombie, Double-O-Delusional.' Jess pulled her coat on and did up the zip.

'Just because you hated her so much you

shouted something rude at her funeral, does not mean that she isn't a zombie. I need to think up a new sidekick name for you.'

'Well, we'll soon find out. If she really is a zombie, she'll bite Paul and the other people that work here, and they'll all come out and attack us.'

'Son of a biscuit, you're right for once!' I said, stuffing my hand into my pocket and feeling around. 'Luckily for you, I brought a gadget-slash-weapon, which also means we have item three from the list ticked off.'

'Why would you bring a weapon to a funeral?' Jess said.

'I ordered it from the internet a week ago. I was just about to test it this morning when Mum walked in. I knew she wouldn't want me having something so dangerous, so I hid it in my pocket. And a good thing I did.'

'Where even are your mum and nan? They're going to be looking for us – we should find them.'

'No, Jessticles. Mum and Nanny are old and weak. If the zombies are coming – and they *are* coming – they'll only slow us down.'

'Nice.' Jess looked at me like I'd just punched a kitten.

I was about to show Jess my new and incredibly cool weapon, when Mum and Nanny Sparrow pushed through the crowd towards us.

'Come on, Alex, we're getting in the car.'

'But I don't want to go home yet, I need to know what's going on.' I side-eyed Jess. 'It could be a matter of national security.'

'We're not going home, love. We're going to the wake.' Nanny put her arm around me.

'You see, Jess, this happens so often that they even have a name for it.'

'What happens so often, Alex?' Nanny said.

'You know, when dead bodies wake up.'

Mum and Nanny laughed. 'A wake is what you call the gathering after a funeral ceremony,' Mum said. 'Where we all get together and remember the person we've lost.'

'You thought we were going to watch Mrs Spires climbing out of her coffin, didn't you?' Jess sniggered.

'No,' I said, my stink cutting through the frosty air. 'Because it makes so much sense to have a party after someone has died. I'm staying here

until I know what's going on.' I put my agent foot down. 'Where do you even have these alleged funeral parties, anyway?'

'At the cricket club,' Mum said. 'There will be a buffet.'

'What are we waiting for? Off to the car!' And I ran ahead as fast as I could across the icy ground.