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Opening extract from

Bulletcatcher

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Warning: Do not attempt any of the techniques described within the book. These can be highly dangerous and result in fatal injuries. The author and publisher take no responsibility for any injuries resulting from attempting these techniques.

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CHAPTER 1
GUNFIRE

The Near Future

Troy looked up from the Batman comic he was reading and locked eyes with a girl on the other side of the display stand.

The girl was geek-pretty with brown eyes, a silver nose stud and short black hair bleached white at the tips. She stopped bobbing her head to the silent beat from her headphones and smiled sweetly at Troy. Only then did he realise he was staring at her.

Troy attempted to smile back but his lips seemed to have frozen solid. He was always

shy in front of girls, even girls reading retro comics on a Saturday morning in Terminus City's grand mall.

Troy stuck his head back in his comic to hide the red flush rising in his cheeks. 'Fourteen years old,' he thought, 'and I've never had a girlfriend, or been kissed! It's just embarrassing, and depressing.'

Then he heard the sound of gunfire. For a moment Troy thought it was his imagination. Sometimes he got so lost in a comic that the story seemed more real than the world around him. But as he turned the page to see Batman punch out one of the Joker's henchmen, he heard it again. Gunshots, followed by screaming.

This time he knew he *wasn't* imagining it.

The store owner – a chubby man with a ponytail and half-moon glasses – peered out into the mall. A woman ran past, wide-eyed with terror.

Troy dumped the Batman comic and ran over to the window. "What's going on?" he asked.

The store owner shook his head. "No idea."

Both of them flinched as another round of gunfire echoed through the mall. They stared as men, women and children fled in every direction. A few shoppers stood frozen in shock, while others cowered behind pillars and hid behind litter bins.

More gunshots. The fast food place opposite emptied in a flash. People knocked over tables and chairs in their rush to escape. Only one man remained. He lay across a table as spilt ketchup dripped onto the floor below.

It took a moment for Troy to realise it wasn't ketchup at all. It was blood.

Sickened at the sight, at last Troy grasped what was happening. The mall was under attack! He felt a surge of sheer panic – what

to do next? His parents had gone for a coffee on the first floor. *Should he go and find them? Should he stay where he was? Or should he run?*

Troy pressed his face against the glass, scanning for his parents among the fleeing crowd. But the mall was in total chaos. He was about to give up hope when he spotted them race down the escalator and towards the comic store.

"The A.F.!" he heard his father scream. "*Run, Troy, run!*"