KILLER T



ALSO BY ROBERT MUCHAMORE

CHERUB
HENDERSON'S BOYS
ROCK WAR





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Killer T *noun* A type of white blood cell that kills damaged cells particularly those that are cancerous, or infected with a virus.

PART ONE

THE BEGINNING

1 SLASHED RUBBER

Deion Powell was the king of high school. Stubbled and swaggering. *Powell 03* on the back of his practice jersey and a splayed walk imposed by monstrous thighs. An amber late slip flapped in his hand as the starting quarterback bowled the empty hallway, crunching in desert grit trailed from the parking lot.

'Whatcha staring at?' Deion snapped instinctively as a skinny ninth grader came out of an empty classroom. He had to hook the door with his sneaker because there was a set of textbooks stacked to his chin.

The kid jolted. Catching the door frame with his shoulder, almost spilling *Algebra* 2s, before Deion's bunched fist set him off in a rodent scuttle.

But there was too much in Powell's head to enjoy the humiliation. There'd been a tussle in the locker room after Monday night practice. A minor miracle that the coaches hadn't found out. And that morning, Deion's kid sister bounced for the school bus, but doubled back before clearing the driveway. Uptight and wide-eyed, the nine-year-old blurted that the front tires on his truck had been knifed.

So, the quarterback took a city bus and fifteen-minute jog missing first period and catching a lecture from a tattooed school clerk, who'd heard too many excuses to care if they were true or not. *Third late arrival since summer recess. Can't come and go as you please, making like you're above the rules.*

Stress bulged Deion's veins. Sweat glazed his oak-brown skin. *Should have taken a picture of my tires to show I'm no liar. Five hundred bucks for new ones. Must have been JJ. Will everything kick off again? What if we bump JJ's crew in the hallway? And no way to avoid it in the locker room …*

Deion's locker had been decorated by the rally team. *Powell 03*, sprayed through a stencil. *Rock Spring Rockets* stickers and nylon rosettes fixed on with sticky pads. An invite to *Aisha's 18th – Foam Partaaay* poked out of the door. He tried fitting a face to Aisha's name as he turned the locker dial.

Eighteen, six, twenty-two.

There was a grunt of realisation as Deion let his backpack drop off his shoulder. He usually left football gear in his truck on the school lot. The locker was crammed. Books, baseball cleats, protein shake pouches and a Bluetooth boom box he'd tried selling to a teammate who'd never come through with the money.

Maybe it was easiest to keep hold of the stuff. *Dump it in Terence's VW at recess*. But this made the walk to the locker another waste of time, on a day when everything was going bad.

Calm down. Think straight. Don't let stuff get to you.

'This sucks,' Deion raged, smashing his palm on his locker and kicking the one below with his size thirteen.

His thoughts had been balled too tight to hear the girl who'd turned into the hallway behind. Pink cotton pumps, a *Rock Spring High* gym shirt and milky, vein-pencilled legs. He'd

startled her and was about to apologise when . . .

Noise ripped. So loud it hurt inside both ears. Blazing light. Heat. The girl screaming. The yellow locker door, unhinged and smashing Deion in the face. Stumbling. Blood. Tripping on something. A mouthful of dust, and ceiling tiles falling like oversized confetti.