

**COUNTDOWN TO  
DANGER**  
CHOOSE YOUR OWN ENDING!



Ten years ago some amazing wordsmiths very patiently taught me almost everything I know about being a writer.

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**JACK HEATH**

# COUNTDOWN TO DANGER

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## **DEADLY HEIST**

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**T**he black van screeches to a stop right in front of you. The side door rolls open. Three men and one woman leap out. All of them have black boots, mirrored sunglasses and knit hats. One of the men wears grey overalls with *SPENCER'S AIR CONDITIONING REPAIR* written on the back. The other three are dressed in black.

There's something frightening about them. You take a step backwards. They move like soldiers and they're bigger than you. The woman has a scar, which runs from her eyebrow down to the corner of her mouth. One of the men has a picture of a knife tattooed on his muscular arm. Another has a large signet ring on one of his fingers. The guy in the overalls has a silver tooth.

They run straight past you and disappear into the HBS bank. The van zooms away, leaving a haze of exhaust in the cold morning air. The echoes of the engine die away.

You look around. Cars cruise along the street. Trucks roll in and out of the warehouse across the road. It's barely light — at this time of year the sun doesn't rise until almost eight — but surely someone else must have seen the black van and its sinister passengers.

If anyone did, they don't seem to care.



Pedestrians wander past you, heads down. No one has reacted.

The bank doesn't look like a bank. If not for the ATM-finder app on Kye's phone, you would have walked right past it. There are no signs on the concrete walls. Shutters cover the few windows. But it's open, which most banks aren't when it's this early.

Kye entered a minute ago to deposit some cash. He said he'd be right back. What if he meets the four strangers from the van? What if they are dangerous?

You whip out your phone and call Kye. But the call doesn't connect, not even to his voicemail. Weird.

You could phone the police. But what would you say? It's not a crime to wear black, or to have a scar, or to run into a bank. The van might have been speeding, but that's it. The cops will think it's nothing. It probably is nothing.

Maybe you should quickly go into the bank, grab Kye and get out. Then you can both decide what to do. You might even get a better look at the four strangers. You could see something that proves they're innocent . . . or they're not.

***If you go into the bank, go to page 5.***

***If you call the cops, go to page 10.***



20:59

“Jacob,” you say.  
“Full name,” Miss Scarlet says.

“Jacob Catton,” you stammer.

She holds out her hand. “Let’s see your ID, ‘Jacob Catton.’”

All you have is a student card. You hand it over with a trembling hand.

She looks at it, thinking, and then pockets it. “OK,” she says. “The bankers should be calling the police right now. When the cops arrive, they’ll call the phone in the staff room. When it rings, you’re going to pick it up and say exactly what I tell you to. One word wrong and your little friend here gets it.”

She points the laser at Kye. The colour drains from his face.

“You don’t have to threaten him,” you say quickly.  
“I’ll do whatever you want.”

“Yes,” she says. “You will. Now—”

A shrill whistle cuts through the air. Miss Scarlet turns to look at the melted hole in the glass at the counter.

“Something’s wrong,” Mr. Sharp says.

Miss Scarlet shushes him. They both move away towards the counter, out of your sight.



While they're distracted, you scan your surroundings, looking for a way out. The air conditioner catches your eye. It's not properly attached to the wall — and you can see a vent behind it. The vent looks just big enough to crawl through. That must be why Miss Scarlet didn't want you near it.

Can you and the other hostages get out of sight before the bad guys turn around?

***If you lead the other hostages into the vent, go to page 12.***

***If you don't risk it, go to page 16.***



26:32

**Y**ou look both ways and then run into the HBS bank. A sliding door lets you into a small foyer, with a security camera and a pair of ATMs. No people. This room is just an airlock, keeping the winter out.

A second door opens and you slip through into a larger room. Dotted lines on the soft grey carpet show customers where to go. One woman is selecting options on a touchscreen. A printer below it spits out a numbered ticket. The woman takes it and sits down on an orange bench next to two other people, both with tickets in their hands.

Kye — a gangly boy with curly blond hair and glasses — is at one of the counters, chatting with a bank teller. He always talks too much, especially to people who are just trying to do their jobs in peace.

You wonder if the teller can even hear him. There's a thick window between him and her. A sign says, *WARNING! SECURITY SHUTTER RISES QUICKLY.*

The big guy with the knife tattoo — in your head you call him Mr. Sharp — is standing near the door. Not blocking it, exactly. Like everyone else in here, he looks like he's waiting for something. Nervously, you walk past him towards Kye.



One of the other men — the man with the signet ring — looms next to the orange bench, a grim smile on his face. He doesn't appear to have a ticket.

The woman with the scar stands in a corner, the hood of her jacket pulled over her head. She's directly under a security camera — in its blind spot.

You can't see the man with the silver tooth and the overalls anywhere.

Kye finishes talking to the teller, takes his receipt through the gap under the glass and starts walking to the exit. He slows down when he sees you.

"Hey," he says. "You get lonely out there?"

"Hurry up," you say.

A bell rings and a message flashes up on a screen: *NOW SERVING 81 AT COUNTER 2.*

One of the people on the bench — a middle-aged woman wearing a fluffy scarf — stands up. The guy with the signet ring peels himself off the wall and approaches the second counter, where Kye just was.

The woman with the scarf looks down at her ticket, confused.

You and Kye walk towards the exit.

"Get ready to run," you whisper. "I think those guys are robbers."

"They're *what?*" Kye asks, too loudly.

Mr. Sharp's eyes narrow.

Someone screams. You turn in time to see the guy with



the signet ring throw a grenade towards the bank teller.

She reacts immediately, kicking something under the counter. A steel shutter shoots upwards, covering the glass. A deafening alarm shrieks.

With a loud clank, Mr. Signet's grenade expands into a giant ball of crooked spikes. The spikes get jammed between the shutter and the ceiling, stopping it from rising all the way. About half a metre of glass is exposed.

Before you can run, another shutter crashes down over the exit. You and Kye are trapped!

The woman with the scar pulls out a futuristic-looking weapon. She points it at the security camera above her head and pulls the trigger. A purple laser shoots out of the muzzle and bores a hole right through the camera. She steps out of the way in time to avoid the falling chunks of blackened metal and plastic.

Then she takes off her hood and her hat, revealing a mane of blood-red hair.

"You've all seen movies," she says. "You know what a bank robbery looks like."

She tosses the laser to Mr. Signet. He climbs up onto the counter and starts melting the exposed glass.

"In twenty-five minutes you all get to walk out of here," says Miss Scarlet — the redhead with the scar. "No one is going to get hurt, because no one is going to do anything foolish. Right?"

Everyone stares at her in terrified silence.



“Right?” she says again.

You nod hurriedly. Kye and the other customers do the same. But you wonder if she’s telling the truth. She melted the camera so it wouldn’t see her face. You and all the other customers have seen it. Will she really let you go?

“You’re all going to sit over there.” She points to the corner. “Backs against the wall, hands where I can see them.”

Mr. Signet has finished cutting through the glass with the laser. The edges of the hole glow like hot coals. He throws the weapon back to Miss Scarlet. Then he pulls some gloves on, clambers through the gap and disappears.

You and the rest of the hostages shuffle over towards the wall. Miss Scarlet watches you closely.

She holds up a device that looks like a cross between a Wi-Fi router and a walkie-talkie. Antennas bristle from the top and red lights blink along one side. “This is a multi-band frequency jammer,” she continues, “with a range of sixty metres. Your cellphones won’t work in here, so don’t try.”

That explains why you couldn’t call Kye from outside. You look at him. His eyes are wide.

The alarm suddenly stops. Mr. Signet must have found a way to switch it off.

Miss Scarlet holds up the laser. “You’ve just seen



what this does to three inches of bulletproof glass,” she says. “Do you know what else it can do?”

No one says anything.

“Behave yourselves,” Miss Scarlet says, “and you won’t find out. You!”

She points at you. Your heart leaps into your mouth.

“Move away from the AC,” she says.

You’re sitting right next to the air conditioning unit. It isn’t switched on. It doesn’t even look like it’s attached to the wall properly — the underside rests on the floor. You scoot away from it. Miss Scarlet must not want you near it because then you wouldn’t be visible from the counter.

“What’s your name, kid?” she asks.

***If you say “Jacob,” go to page 3.***

***If you say “Brianna,” go to page 121.***



26:32

**Y**ou dig out your phone and dial emergency services. Once again, the call doesn't connect. You check the screen. The signal strength is good. There must be something wrong with your phone.

You look around. Maybe a pedestrian will let you borrow their phone.

And then you see a police officer, standing on the street corner near a patrol car.

Unable to believe your luck, you run over to him. He's observing the street very carefully, perhaps looking for someone in particular. He's clean shaven, with hazel eyes and dirty blond hair peeking out from under his police hat.

"Excuse me."

He looks at you, but doesn't say anything.

"I think that bank is getting robbed," you say.

His eyes widen. He looks at the bank, then at you. He scans the street again.

"Four suspicious looking people just went in," you continue. "And then their van sped off."

"I see," he says. "Suspicious looking? In what way?"

Feeling silly, you say, "They were wearing black and they were running."



The officer smiles slightly. “That doesn’t sound like anything to worry about.”

“Come with me,” you say. “I’ll show you.”

“No, you go home,” he says. “I’ll keep an eye on things here.”

Kye could be in danger, but this police officer isn’t taking you seriously. Maybe he would listen if you exaggerated a little bit.

***If you tell him the robbers had weapons and ski masks, go to page 107.***

***If you go back to the bank and try to sneak in, go to page 111.***

