

# TOM BENDER

"A story that captures the sweet stupidity of kids coming of age,  
yet deals with a profound moment in American history"





## What writers are saying about RUN FOR IT!

“An adventure to die for. But wait! With pluck and luck and loyalty teenage buddies Robert and Merwyn race through the pages of Tom Bender’s kids-on-the-loose dime novel dodging disaster and bedeviling bad guys from the first scene to the last. Hang on.”

– *Frank C. Strunk, author of Jordon’s Wager,  
Jordon’s Showdown and Throwback*

“It’s early in the day, yet Robert Bell has already witnessed an armored car heist, faced a blazing tommy gun, and found a dead man on the driveway. Thanks to his friend Merwyn’s street smarts, the two boys are still alive...for the moment. With nothing going for him but a quick brain and the ebbing innocence of childhood, Robert must face down the mob. Adventure, guts, determination, and the true loyalty of lifelong friends– Robert and Merwyn have it all. Grab onto their shirttails and RUN FOR IT!”

– *Mary Anna Evans, author of  
the Faye Longchamps Archeological Mysteries*

“The Hardy Boys on Speed.”

– *Ann Bannon, author of the classic Beebo Brinker Chronicles*

“ If you want a story that has the sweet stupidity of kids coming of age, yet deals with a profound moment in American history, try this first novel. It takes your heart.”

– *Ann Perdue, English teacher and book critic*



***RUN  
FOR IT!***



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FOR IT!***

**Tom Bender**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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For Beth with love



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## ONE

(Forest Oaks, Illinois, June 23, 1939)

“Off!”

Robert moved an arm, another arm, his legs. *I'm alive.*

“Off!”

He rolled off of Merwyn and felt soft, cool grass under his stomach. *A robbery*, he thought. *A Brinks job. They didn't look like Brinks guys. "I must have fainted."*

The possibility that he'd passed out was so astonishing that the idea came out aloud.

“I pulled you down, jerk!”

Hearing this, both the assertion and the tone, Robert felt a little better about himself. *Okay, okay. I didn't faint.*

The air stank. A line of black smoke went straight up from the burning tires of the armored car.

Things were coming back: the careening armored car just missing them, knocking the mower away; the Packard at the curb; the ball of fire exploding with a *whoosh* under the armored

car; the neighbor lady jumping screaming from her maroon LaSalle.

Looking now, he saw her lying on his front stoop. *Is she dead?* He knew from his father that her husband ran some labor union.

Robert saw Merwyn get up and run toward the driveway. He got himself up and followed. The man lay still, with open, unmoving eyes, the back of his head flat on the concrete, blood and streaks of gray oozing out of his nose and ears.

Robert turned away and puked. He remembered seeing the guy running with the other two, hauling the big green bag, and then like he was dancing. *That was it, dancing.*

Turning again to look, Robert saw Merwyn reach down into the grass, pick up a tan leather wallet and put it in his pocket.

Robert tasted bile, spit. "What're you doing, Merwyn?"

"Those guys tried to kill us, Bob."

"So? Leave it." He remembered the guy jumping out of the Packard, grabbing the bag from the guy on the driveway, pulling him up. The *plop* as his head hit the driveway.

Merwyn's eyes said, *You are so naive.* He beckoned Robert to follow him back to the tree, felt around the chipped bark and scraped at a hole. "Feel it."

Robert reached up and put his finger in the hole. Buried in the wood was a slick, warm substance. With his fingers he traced four more lead-filled holes.

The big memory of impending death came to Robert: the Packard backing up, the red-faced guy bringing up the tommy gun. The burst of noise. The tree had saved them.

"Why'd they shoot at *us*?" Robert said, amazed.

"We seen 'em, that's why."

Robert tasted bile, spit. He felt a chill, felt the intense heat from the armored car. "Why'd you take it?" He spit.

“Now we got leverage.”

“What are you talking about?”

Merwyn sighed. “It’s like insurance, Bob. We got something they don’t know we got. We got control.”

“Control?” Robert was losing what control he had. “Who says?”

“My dad, that’s who. ‘Find the leverage.’ One of his little sayings.”

“We should give it to the cops.”

Merwyn shook his head. “Oh, no. Then *they* got the control. And we *do* get knocked off.”

“They who?”

Merwyn shrugged. He took off running, heading toward the back of Robert’s house.

Robert followed, right into the outstretched arms of his mother. She pulled him to the back porch.

She looked to Robert as pale as a catfish belly.

“There’s a dead guy on your neighbor’s driveway,” Merwyn said to her.

“Dead? Did you say dead?” She led the boys into the living room and peeked out the window. “Oh!” She put her hand to her mouth in horror.

“Mrs. Friend’s on the porch,” Robert said.

“Dead? She’s dead too?”

Robert eased the front door open. Mrs. Friend’s head, which had been propped up by the door, slipped across the threshold.

Red lights flashed and a fire bell clanged. Stinking black smoke hazed the neighborhood. Robert saw people sneaking up on the scene like so many deer coming out of the woods. He scanned the wreck to see if he could make out what might be left of his lawn mower.

Snapping out of her trance, his mother said, "Are you hurt, Mona? I'm so sorry."

The woman on the doorstep looked up. "You heard me banging on your door but you didn't let me in?"

A man in a tan suit stepped up onto the stoop, looked down at Mrs. Friend and said, "Can you get up? You sure?" He gave her a hand up. He looked at Robert, his mother, Merwyn. "Detective Lieutenant Quinlan, FOPD," he said, displaying a wallet with a badge.

He was squat and square, bald with a ring of white hair. Robert figured the bulge under his coat was a shoulder holster.

Mrs. Friend said, "My car! Where's my car?"

Ignoring her the detective said, "Anybody see this happen?"

"We saw the whole thing," Robert said. "We were under that tree. They—" He felt Merwyn's eyes boring into him.

"May I sit down?" Mrs. Friend said.

"Yeah, go sit down," the detective said. "I want to talk to you — "and you" — he pointed at Robert's mother. "Stay here. You two come with me."

The boys pointed at themselves. "Me?"

"Yeah, you."

"Where are you taking them?"

The detective picked Robert's mother's hand off his sleeve. "Down to the squad car. Ask 'em a few questions. Then we'll have a few for you."

At this point Robert got back to Mrs. Friend's question. "They took it," he said.

"They took it?"

He nodded.

"Come on you two," the detective said.

As Robert and Merwyn walked with him to the squad car, men hauled a stretcher to an ambulance.

Robert's stomach hurt. *Why'd they have to kill the guy?* He was reading Merwyn's signals: *keep your mouth shut!*