

Teen Valour

by

Alaric Adair

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This book is the first in a series.
“Teen Valour People” is a companion book.
“Company Mole” the second in the series will be released soon.

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Foreword

This world is facing great problems such as global warming. Most of the problems arise from population growth. Many powerful people know that these problems have to be fixed. Waiting for governments to agree globally and to provide the answers will not work in time. Some people feel it is time for strong leaders to arise to take those tough decisions. Sometimes those leaders will feel that they have to use unlikely allies and tough methods. These impatient people are going to change the future world of our hero Adam.

The mind of a young person is limited only by what they he or she has been told is impossible. Many of the rules taught to young people are social rules to help people live together in society, but some rules arise from the limited imagination of adults. If we give a young person the support and opportunity to develop they can do amazing things. I have had the privilege in my life to lead people in a youth organisation. I've seen how teenagers can achieve amazing things once that they are released from the chains of other people's imaginations.

I've had the idea for the book Teen Valour for several years. It is time to release the story of what happens when you take the boy who lives next door and give him opportunity to develop. Adam Cranford, the hero of this book is one such boy. At the age of 13 he attracts the attention of an ancient and benevolent organisation called the Foundation of Honour. He gains the respect of the leaders of the Foundation and he shows them that he can lead other people. He is given the opportunity to develop. How will he cope in the world of the unlimited?

The path is not easy for our hero. He finds real danger, deception and despair along his path. This book is the first of a series, so be patient as I introduce you to the hero and his friends. You will see more of them in later books. For those who love this book there is an Adam Cranford club at my website. Club members can ask questions about the plots and get early previews of the next books.

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August 2009

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Not least I must pass my thanks to my ever patient wife and family.

Chapter 1 Disaster at School

Adam began to suspect that this Monday was going to be very different from other Mondays. He didn't realise then that as a consequence of this Monday he would end up fighting to save the lives of 30 school children including his own. His suspicions about this day were triggered when everybody in school started smiling at him when he arrived through the school gates. Even some of the Year 7 boys and girls were pointing him out to each other. When he was walking to his normal place in the morning assembly he could feel everyone watching him. Of course he had a pretty good idea of what had caused the excitement, but he hoped against hope that it wasn't public knowledge so soon.

The day's lessons had started normally. He didn't even have to think of an excuse about his maths homework as he had worked hard over the weekend. He had made sure that he gave no reason for the teachers to pick on him. At the end of the second session during maths class his fears were confirmed when one of the school secretaries entered the room and passed a note to the class teacher. Mr Fulbright read the note and looked in the direction of Adam. A hushed whisper rushed around the classroom as the teacher leant forward and beckoned to him. Adam's heart sunk and his face paled as he heard the fateful words from the teacher.

"Master Cranford, you are to report to the Headmaster's office immediately. Please go with Miss Wilkinson."

He was dimly aware of the rest of the class cheering and hooting as he gathered his school books and bag then headed to the top of the class room. He felt pats on his back from the other boys as he walked past their desks and out through the door of the class room. The door swung to with a squeak and a click of finality behind him. He had to rush to keep up with Miss Wilkinson as she set off indifferent to his progress. The clack from the heels of her shoes remorselessly rattled along the dark wood floors of the poorly lit corridor. She said nothing to Adam along the route. She paused only when she reached the tall dark door of the Headmaster's office. A green light was showing on the control light box by the door. She knocked twice on the heavy oak door and grasping the well worn brass door handle swung it open. Stepping into the room she ushered the boy into the room with a single imperious sweep of her arm.

"You wished to see Adam Cranford, Headmaster."

Wilkinson stalked out of the room, closing the door firmly behind Adam. He stood there awkwardly clutching his school bag of books to his chest. He was waiting for the storm to break. There was utter silence in the room save for the heavy slow tick tock of a grandfather clock standing against the wall. The Headmaster's desk was positioned in front of a large window. The bright light from the window made it difficult to see the Headmaster's face where he was sat behind the desk. The rest of the room was quite dark and gloomy. An empty worn brown wooden

school chair was positioned one metre in front of the desk. To the left hand side were sat two men whom Adam did not recognise. To the right hand side sat a man whom Adam had no trouble in recognising. It was his father and he did not look happy. The Headmaster impatiently gestured to the empty chair.

“Sit down Cranford.”

Adam walked over to the chair and sat down glancing at his father who frowned at him. He clutched his school bag to his chest and sat with a straight back facing the Headmaster.

“This is Mr Reece. He is from the local education authority. The other gentleman is Detective Inspector Norris from the local police. I think you will know why you have been called here?”

Adam felt blood rush to his face as he blushed. He could feel his heart thumping rapidly in his chest.

“No Sir Mr Stilson. I’m not sure. Is there something wrong?”

The Headmaster glanced at Norris and then back at Adam.

“Perhaps you might like to look at this photograph and explain?”

The man lifted a large photo print from a folder on his desk and slid it across the desk towards Adam.

“Come on boy, take a closer look.”

Adam pretty much knew what he would see in the picture before he rose to look at it on the Headmaster’s desk. As his father would say, “Sometimes even the best laid plans go wrong.” This was one of those times.

“Well Cranford? Tell us what you see? Do you recognise anyone in the photograph? Don’t be shy now.”

Adam could see his own face grinning back at him from the photograph. He was sitting alone behind the steering wheel of a vintage Mini Cooper S car. His eyes were glowing red in the picture from the camera flash like some kind of demon. His hands encased in fake hairy gorilla gloves grasped the steering wheel like a crazy driver. Clenched between his teeth was one of Stilson’s tobacco pipes. What was unusual about the picture was that the Mini was inside an office room. In fact it clearly was the Headmaster’s Study. The distinctive pictures on the walls, oak door and clock were easily seen in the background. After looking at the photograph he sat back in the hard chair.

“We know that there were other boys involved in this Cranford, but we are not sure how you got the car into the room. The doorway is too small for the car. You boys must have dismantled the car and rebuilt it in the room.”

“No Mr Stilson. It is just someone playing a joke using graphics software to make a fake photograph with my face in the picture.”

“Cranford, did you look at the time shown on the clock in the picture? The date marked on the calendar. At that time of night on last Friday night I had reported

to the police that the car had been stolen from outside of my home. Look below the chair that you are sitting on and you will see a black motor oil stain on the floor. My car leaks oil. The licence disk in the picture is the same expiry as my car licence disk. When you people returned the car to my home you unfortunately parked it facing the wrong way round. We found this photo pinned to the front doors of the school this morning. You may think it is highly amusing but we do not. We want to know who is involved and how you got the car into the room. We know that the older boys must have been the ring leaders. We want to know how you avoided triggering the building alarm system. Pay attention and look at me when I'm speaking to you boy."

Adam had been staring at the frame of the large window behind the Headmaster, hoping that the temporary fixing they had made last Friday night would be strong enough to hold the window in place if there was a storm. He guessed that Hudson had spread copies of the photographs around the school. A revenge for what he'd done to Hudson last year. He remembered Hudson taking the photographs on the Friday night. They'd planned to release the photo's at the end of summer term. Mr Stilson was a bad tempered school principal hated by most of the pupils, but he was very proud and protective of his vintage Mini car.

"Err sorry Mr Stilson, it was just a joke. We didn't do any damage to it Sir. I can't grass up my mates Sir."

"Adam, be sensible about this. You don't need to protect these other boys. They must have tricked you into sitting in the car. I've spoken with the Head and he says you will only be suspended to a couple of weeks if you identify the ringleaders," his father urged from the side of the desk.

"It's not that simple Mr Cranford. There is the matter of 'Taking without owner consent' and also the cost of a safety inspection of my car in a garage. There is no telling what damage they caused when they reassembled my Mini. They may have caused hundreds of pounds damage to my car. I know you have said that you will pay for that, but it is the leaders of this crime who should pay."

Adam sat with a sick feeling in his stomach. He knew that there had been no damage to the Mini because it had not been dismantled. A group of four seniors had slipped the insecure door lock of the Mini and silently wheeled it to a nearby trailer. At the school they had assembled scaffolding and removed the whole window of the Headmaster's ground floor office ready before the car's arrival. They had then pushed the car up and down scaffolding ramps with the help of some ropes and pulleys through the window void. The most difficult bit had been remembering to put everything back in exactly the right place after replacing the Headmaster's desk after removing the car.

He also knew who the ringleader of the raid had been, it was himself. They had carefully rehearsed it all before at a farm that was the home of one of the seniors. There had been a few months of measuring and planning. He knew that he should have supervised the return of the car. Even though there were eight other boys

involved there was no way that he could betray them. He knew that he had to take the punishment by himself as nothing was to be gained by identifying them. He was a bit worried that the replaced window frame did look a bit shaky still.

“I’m sorry Mr Stilson I cannot tell you the names of the others. I was here on Friday night and we didn’t damage your car, but that is all that I’m prepared to say.”

“You refuse to tell me boy? In that case I will give you two days to reconsider your actions and refusal. If I do not hear from you with a full list of names you will be permanently expelled from this school. As of this moment you are on suspension. Mr Cranford, the school secretary will write to you confirming this decision concerning your son and provide details of the appeal process. She will also provide you with contacts to arrange your son’s continued education at another place. Cranford Junior, I believe that Detective Inspector Norris wants to talk with you down at the police station. This meeting is now over. Mr Reece, if I might have a word with you before you leave?”

Adam stood and left the room followed by his father and the policeman. He could not help but notice that someone had pinned another copy of the photograph on the outside of the Headmaster’s door. It was obvious that the rest of the school knew about this event that had now gone so badly wrong.

“Mr Cranford. I don’t need speak with your son at the Station right now. If you could phone later and make an appointment that would be much more convenient. On the basis of what I’ve seen so far I don’t think that this is a matter that should trouble the police too much or lead to further action. There doesn’t seem to have been any real damage and you have offered to make good any damage that may have occurred. I just need to have a brief word alone with Adam before we leave.”

Adam’s father gave a sigh of relief and gave a gesture of acceptance as he walked away down the corridor leaving the policeman with his son.

“This conversation is strictly off the record, if you mention it to anyone I will deny it ever happened. Understood?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Young man it looks like you almost got away with that except for someone setting you up with the photographs spread around the school. Don’t worry. We at the police station know all about Stilson and how the lads here hate him. Two of my sons went to this school so we know how strict he can be with you all. It is very brave of you not to grass up on the leaders of this event, but are you sure it is worth getting thrown out of school just to protect them? You should know that we have CCTV footage of who was driving the Land Rover with the trailer on that night. We can also guess where you guys liberated the scaffolding from a certain building site. Strictly speaking what you did was breaking and entering which is a crime, but we are not going to follow up unless Stilson insists. I’ve seen the marks in the grass outside of the window, so I have a pretty good idea of what you lads did. You need to think carefully about whether you need to protect those boys and

the cost to you of expulsion from school.”

“I was the ringleader. I planned the whole thing. The other guys just helped out. If I tell Stilson who it was we will all get punished anyway and that wouldn’t be fair seeing how it was my idea.”

Norris stood back, looked at Adam and grinned.

“Just how old are you again? Thirteen isn’t it? Planned just by you?”

Adam nodded his head.

“Yes Sir.”

“Right, well you best go home with your father. I guess that he is going have a lot to say to you about this.”

He rested his hand on Adam’s shoulder and led him out of the school walking along with the boy’s father. Adam looked back up at the school windows. Most were filled with boys’ and girls’ faces watching him leave. The grapevine worked fast in this school, it had to be efficient to beat the rigid discipline. He knew that whilst he may be hero to them he would not be coming back to the hated school. He knew regardless of what his parents might have to say to him back at home that he would not be changing his mind. While he had some good friends here that he didn’t want to lose, there was no way would he come back.

Their trusty family car was parked in the visitor’s car park. It was an old Ford estate car almost as old as Adam and had been in the family since his father had bought it brand new from the car show room. Adam sought refuge in the back seat, carelessly dropping his school bag on the seat next to him.

Gordon Cranford was deep in thought as he drove his son home that afternoon. He knew that it would be impossible to get his son to change his mind. His stubbornness was a legend in the family even from when he was a baby. He knew that his son had not been happy at the school, but he just could not believe that his son would get involved in such a prank. It had not been the school that they had chosen when the time had come to make a school selection. His place had been allocated by the local authority. They couldn’t afford to send him to the really good private school nearby. Adam might have to go to Davison High which was a large comprehensive school in the next town. That would mean a lot more travel for the boy. He wondered if there was some way that they could get their son to back down and apologise to the Headmaster. The Headmaster had a reputation for strictness so there was no way he would change his mind otherwise.

After twenty five minutes of driving they reached their home in Chalfont. It was a small country cottage that Gordon had inherited from his father. There was no way that they could afford to buy such a house in the area on the money from his current job as the manager of a local Garden Centre. It was a good area to bring up a family with countryside nearby and a lot of social activities. He parked the car in the rose bush lined driveway and they jumped out.

“Ok Adam, you’d had best let me speak to your mother first and then I have to

get back to work in the Garden Centre. We'll all talk about this in the evening and decide what we can do with you. I'm quite angry with you now and need to cool down first."

"I'm really sorry about this Dad. It shouldn't have gone wrong like this. We planned it real carefully so there was no damage. It was just meant to get some stuff ready for the end of term."

"I know Adam that you probably meant no harm, but it hasn't turned out that way has it? Now we have got a real problem on our hands. Go get changed out of your school things and like I said we'll talk about it tonight. Don't worry too much I'm sure that we will find a way round this."

As they entered the house Adam's mother Amanda was awaiting them having been phoned by her husband before they arrived.

"Hi Darling, we need to talk about our son and then I have to get back to work."

Gordon guided his young son up the stairs whilst he directed his wife into the kitchen. He would deal with the first questions and try to calm things down. No doubt that there would be some tough questions and raised voices around the kitchen table tonight.

Adam slowly stomped up the dark stairs to his bedroom and dropped his bag on the floor. He tugged off his tie and school jacket then slumped on top of his soft comfortable bed. He lay back closed his eyes and sighed. He was almost in tears.

"This must be the worst day of my life. How could it have gone so wrong?" he thought to himself. He reached over to his bed side table and grabbed his mobile phone. They weren't supposed to take them to school because of the risk of mugging. Looking at the screen he could see he'd missed a lot of calls and messages. He scrolled through the texts. There were a mixture of messages from his mates, some calling him an absolute nutter and others calling him a hero and saying it was so unfair he'd been expelled. It seemed like everyone had heard about it already. There was even a text from Hudson saying that he was sorry to hear about what had happened. Adam typed a brief response to that one asking Hudson if he'd had any luck in finding a father yet.

The voice mails were similar in nature, though one was from his best friend at the school and also the main co-conspirator on the Mini car photo event of last Friday night. Bill had arranged the temporary liberation of the scaffolding necessary to hoist the Headmaster's Mini into his study

"Adz mate I was really sorry to hear that they got you. It's so cool that you haven't grassed on us. I will understand if you have to do that. Call me back please?"

Adam clicked off the phone making a note to call Bill back later in the afternoon when his friend was away from school. There was not much he could do now so he sat at his desk and cranked up his faithful PC and signed on to his favourite Internet multiplayer game. His normal crew wouldn't be on now but he knew some of the players from the West Coast of the USA who would be on now. He

turned up the sound on his speakers and lost himself in the game as he battled against the other players. At this time of day no one would be complaining about the noise from the game. He played for a couple of hours, but his mind was really not into the game. He lost a couple of hard earned useful weapons and some armour. It was a relief really when his mobile phone rang interrupting his game.

“Hi this is Adam.”

“Adz you nutter, how did you manage to get caught then?”

It was Bill his best mate at school.

“It was Hudson I think. He set me up with those photographs. Old Stilson didn’t have a clue how we did it. The police had worked out what we had done but they seem pretty cool. I don’t think they like Stilson either. I’ve been expelled from school unless I tell them by Wednesday who was involved.”

“Expelled?! That’s harsh. I guess you will have to tell them. We were all in it together and you can’t take all the blame.”

“I’m not sure what to do at the moment. If I tell them it will mean that all of us get punished. I think it is best that I take the heat on this one. I hate the school really.”

“Adz, that is plain crazy you can’t screw up the rest of your life for just an end of term prank, even if it was the best one ever. I’m going to talk to the others and we’ll all go talk to Stilson. We might even tell them where we have buried Hudson.”

“Bill, don’t do that. Stilson has never liked me all of the time I’ve been at school. I’m not really sure it was Hudson who gave me away anyway. Look I’m going to take the heat on this. It is not going to be the end of the world. Something will come up. I guess I can’t hang out tonight cos I have to ‘discuss the issues’ tonight, but how about we go down to the Village Square tomorrow night at seven? You can tell the others what is happening.”

“Adz, you are an absolute nutter. If you change your mind just let me know. I’ve got no problem with taking my share of the blame on this. I have to go. Speak to you later ok? Don’t let this get you down.”

After lunch, Adam spent the rest of the afternoon hanging around the house. He read books but could not settle into the stories. He tried watching the television but found it really boring. His mother was around but was clearly trying to avoid much conversation about the events at school. She had promised Gordon that those discussions would wait until the evening when everyone was available. The tense atmosphere was relaxed briefly when Gilly, Adam’s younger sister returned home from school.

“Hi Addie, what are you doing home so early? You throwing a sickie or something?”

Adam wasn’t quite sure what to say. Her mother swiftly hustled her into the kitchen where Adam could hear his mother explaining the events of the day to Gilly. Clearly she had been told not to discuss it, but curiosity seeped out of her

wide grey eyes when she came back to the lounge after changing out of her school uniform. However before she could ask any questions they heard their mother's voice floating through from the kitchen.

"Young lady, you have homework to do. Get your tail upstairs and get the work done. And keep your TV turned off."

She stood with a twirl of her blond hair, pulled a face at her older brother and smiled as she flounced out of the room frustrated that she had not been able to get the full gossip from her brother. Adam was bored. The waiting around for the big "discussion" in the evening was killing him. Grabbing a football he set off to find some school friends, but before he reached the front gate his heard his mother call to him.

"Just where do you think you are going young man? You are grounded until we get this school thing sorted out. Now go upstairs and study or something. Heaven knows that you will have to be working hard at school in the future."

"Aw mom" was the automatic response from the boy, but he knew from the tone of her voice that she would not be taking any argument from him. He stormed up the stairs and slammed his bedroom door.

The evening meal was a quiet affair with the four of them gathered around the dining table. Gilly had managed totally against her nature not to ask any questions about the "Expulsion", but clearly was eager to find out the full detail. The meal seemed to last for ever. The clock on the sideboard cupboard dragged its hands with deliberate slowness. Finally Gordon Cranford pronounced:

"Gilly, clear the table and go get the dish washing done in the kitchen. Your mother and I need to have a serious discussion with your brother."

Unusually the girl did not protest and efficiently collected the dirty plates and cutlery. As she went into the kitchen she made sure that doors were left open so that she could hear every detail of the conversation.

"Adam you have had some time to think over what happened in school today. You have been expelled. You might even have to go to Court if the police take action and I might have to spend a great deal of money that I don't have to fix Stilson's car. I won't even ask what possessed you to get involved in such a prank, but we do need to know if you are going to do the sensible thing and apologise to Stilson?"

"Dad, there's no point. I hate the school and I hate Stilson. He's never going to forget this. If I name the other boys it just means that we all get punished."

"Adam you should listen to your father. You know how difficult it is to get into school round here. If you don't do what the headmaster says you are going to end up at Davison High. That will mean about an hour's journey each way and it has a worse reputation than your current school."

Adam's grey eyes appeared to darken from a pale grey to a slate grey and his expression hardened.

"My 'Ex-school' mom. I'm not going back."

Both parents immediately recognised the stubborn expression of their son. They knew from long battles in the past that it was going to be impossible to force their son to change his mind. At that point the house phone rang.

“Gilly can you stop listening and get that call please?” queried her mother.

They sat in silence for a moment each pondering what should be the next move.

“Dad, the call’s for you. Some guy called Mr Robertson.”

“Robertson? I’ve never heard of him, but I suppose I’ll best talk to him. I’ll be right back.” He left the room to pick up the phone in the hallway.

“Adam Cranford” hissed his mother. “There is no point in getting stubborn on this foolishness. You are going to apologise and name the other people involved. I refuse to let you destroy your future in school. Not to mention the cost of getting you a new uniform and the costs of fixing the car.”

“Mum, there is no damage to the car. It won’t cost anything. We wheeled it into the office without taking it apart. The uniform won’t cost any extra it is almost the end of school year and I’ve just about grown out of all of my stuff anyway. I’m not going back and that is final. Stilson is over reacting because he hates me and I hate him.”

Adam knew better than to turn his back on his mother, so instead sat in his dining chair arms crossed glaring defiantly at his mother. He knew that this was going to be tough because like him she would never give in. She would chip away at him for weeks if necessary until she got her way. There wouldn’t be any harsh punishment, just constant pressure and questions. This time however he was not going to give way. Gilly crept into the room and hugged her mother trying to provide a break in the tension. She recognised the battle of wills that was starting.

“Adam, you know that there is no point arguing on this apology. It is going to happen and you are going back to the school. It is outrageous that you should be taking the blame for the other boys. What you did was wrong and you know it. You should be punished for that, but you should not take the whole blame.”

“No Mum.”

A tense silence reigned in the room, though they could hear Adam’s father on the phone in the hallway.

“Adam, don’t go silent on me. Tell me who was involved? Why did you leave the house late at night without telling us? I’ll bet that Bill Hetherington was involved in this. You two are always getting into crazy things together. I’m going to go see his mother and get to the bottom of this.”

“No Mum.”

“Don’t you ‘No Mum’ me. Your soft hearted father might give up on this, but I will not give in on this. You are not going to ruin your life because of your stupid stubbornness.”

“No Mum. I’m not being stupid.”

“Gilly, go to your room please and leave us alone. I need to have a serious chat with Adam.”

The young girl left the room. She rarely saw her mother get this angry. She also knew that Adam would never break.

“You can forget thinking about going to another school. I am not going to make any arrangements for you to go to Davison High. You are going to apologise and get your place back. You can recover from this situation. We will help you Adam.”

“No Mum. If necessary I’ll call Davison High myself.”

“You can’t do that. They won’t speak to you.”

“Yes they will Mom.”

“Adam, you may be almost 14 years old but there are times when you have to do what your parents tell you to do. This is for your own good.”

“No mom. I’m not giving in on this. I know it and you know it.”

Just then they heard his father put down the phone handset. The tense silence was broken as his father emerged into the room with a puzzled look on his face.

“It looks like we should postpone this discussion until tomorrow evening. Apparently this Mr Robertson works for an organisation that helps schoolboys who get into trouble. Somehow they have heard about what happened at your school and they want to come and speak with us tomorrow evening at 7p.m. He said don’t make any decisions just yet because he may be able to help out. I think he’s from some type of law firm, but he wouldn’t say what it was. As we are obviously not going to reach agreement tonight I suppose it won’t hurt to wait another day, but we are going to have to talk to Mr Stilson on Wednesday.”

“Adam, I think you should go to your room now. Don’t forget to put your clothes away tidily and also have a shower.” He gave his son a hug and led him to the door of the kitchen. Gordon smiled at Gilly who was sat on the stairs trying to catch the details of the conversation. The two children walked up the stairs. Gilly followed into Adam’s room.

“Don’t think you are getting away that easily Addie. Come on tell me all the gory details.”

“I told you not to call me Addie...”

The door closed and the rest of the conversation could not be heard.

Chapter 2 The Other Side of the World

It was just coming up to the end of a long night shift in the dimly lit laboratory. With just the one worker present things were relatively quiet. The peace was only slightly disturbed by the rustle of her heavy protective suit and the wheezing sound from the exhaust air vent valve in her plastic full head helmet.

Hea Gwon was tired and the work was boring, but she knew she had to be meticulous. She was annoyed that her country could not afford proper monitoring equipment and that this monitoring work had to be undertaken manually. Even the university laboratory where she had trained in Scotland had better equipment than here. The sanctions against her country had prevented them importing what was needed. It was far too easy for foreign security services to track such devices. Then they would quickly guess what was being developed at this secret establishment hidden deep in the mountains of her country. Much effort had gone into the improvising equipment that could safely meet the needs of the project.

Despite the underlying complexity of the dangerous project the monitoring work was simple to perform. It was not dangerous if all of the temperatures and pressures were correctly maintained. Her suit would provide protection if there was a sudden leakage. In several locations around the room were cages containing rats. If they started sneezing or stopped moving around she would know there was a problem with a leak in the room. They could have used electronic biosensors but they were expensive and difficult to source. The rats were cheap, effective and self replicating.

Hea moved from flask to flask in the long rows in the laboratory. She had to check temperature, pressure, that there were no leaks and that the agitators were working properly at the base of the flask. In the dim light of the laboratory she had to use a head torch to make the readings. It was the type of task that an unskilled person could perform rather than bore someone of PhD qualification, but she knew that the whole thing had to be kept strictly secret. There was going to be a progress inspection by Headquarters inspectors later in the day. Everything would have to be spot on or next week they could all be employed sweeping the streets of their capital city. Her superiors rewarded success generously but awarded harsh punishment for failure. Her boss Mr Gu was already concerned about the poor yield from the existing installation.

The lights flickered on in the office next to the laboratory. She looked up and saw that Mr Gu had arrived early. He came to the viewing window of the laboratory and made the symbol of a telephone using his hand against the side of his head. She nodded and moved to the intercom set against the wall.

“Ah honourable Mr Gu how can I be of service to you?”

“I have come to tell you Assistant Gwon that we have decided to move the laboratory. We have decided that there is a location where there will be better results and

it will be safer for our nation. It will be your task to plan this move and to set up the new laboratory. Come out from the containment laboratory now so that we can discuss this in detail.”

“At once Mr Gu, but what about the monitoring of the project.”

“It has been declared a success and will be dismantled. Other people will arrive to undertake that work. You must hurry now, they have given us a very urgent project date. We have little time to waste. I am afraid it will be some time before you can meet with your family again. We will tell them that you are safe and doing very important work.”

Hea disconnected her air supply tube, turned on her portable air unit and moved to the air lock exit of the laboratory. Passing through the air lock she stepped under a power shower which washed her protective suit with strong disinfectant. Once dressed in her outside clothes she went to a bare office where her boss was waiting.

“Assistant Gwon you must prepare yourself for a long journey. You are going back to Scotland to continue this research. You do not need to pack any clothes. They will be provided to you on the journey. You will leave now.”

Hea Gwon remembered the country with some affection. After a tough selection programme she had at the age of 12 been trained in the English language by her mother country. Disguised as a refugee from the Vietnam War she had been smuggled into Britain and had finished her education as a Doctor in Scotland.

They left the building passing through three separate solid steel security doors along the route. Outside of the laboratory building with Mr Gu she stepped into a waiting car. The car driver drove them to the conference centre located outside of the double layered security wire fences of the laboratory compound. To exit the compound the car had to pass through two security gates. The gate locations were 30 metres apart. Each gate was manned by armed guards who, at each gateway, carefully checked the identity papers for each person in the car. Looking back against the early morning sun Hea Gwon saw for the last time the large mound of earth that disguised the laboratory building from American spy satellites.

Chapter 3 The Foundation Calls

Aloud knocking at the front door jolted Adam from his daydream. Looking out from his bedroom window he could see that a postman was waiting. He realised that his mother must be out of the house that morning. After a restless night he had slept through his alarm. Throwing on a dressing gown he rattled down the stairs to get to the door before the postman left. He could see the man turning away through the glass panel of the front door.

“Hang on. I’m just coming.”

The postman turned back as the boy swung open the door.

“I’ve got a special delivery letter for Mr and Mrs Cranford. It needs signing for.”

“I’m their son is that ok?”

“I guess that will be ok if they are not in. Sign here and print your name here.”

The postman pushed forward a clipboard and a pen. As Adam signed the receipt the man dug a letter out from his bag. Removing a bar code label from the letter he stuck it onto the receipt and handed the thick brown envelope to Adam. Adam stood with the door ajar turning the letter over and over. He heard the man jump into his post van to drive off with the clatter of a diesel engine. He recognised the post mark on the letter as having been sent from his school. He closed the front door with a soft click and wandered into the kitchen then dropped the envelope on the kitchen table. It all suddenly seemed so real now. He had been expelled. It was a bit like a dream yesterday. Everything had happened so fast, it was almost as if he just woke up everything would be back to normal. The letter changed everything now to reality.

He dropped vacantly on to a kitchen chair alone in the house. What could he do now? It was a relief not to have to rush to catch the school bus, but he knew it couldn’t last. He just didn’t know what to do next. Everyone was at school or work. For Adam it was as if the world had rushed by leaving him in some kind of isolated time bubble. After some time he realised that there was already another letter on the kitchen table. It was addressed to him in his mother’s handwriting. He opened the letter.

Dear Adam,

You will not be feeling good this morning. Don't worry darling we will look after you. I'm sure we can sort out this whole problem before too long. I've left you lunch in the fridge. Please wash up the breakfast things and put them away after you have eaten.

I'll be back from work at 2 o'clock this afternoon. If you need to contact me call me on the usual number.

Lots of Love,

Mum

ps: If you get bored please clean out all of the junk in the garden shed.

He absentmindedly poured himself a bowl of cereal and added milk. Sitting quietly he wondered what he could do for the rest of the day. He thought about practicing the guitar. He and his school friends were trying to form a band, but he just didn't seem to be mastering the guitar. Adam supposed there would not be much point in continuing with that because he was bound to lose touch with his school mates. It seemed that everything had gone so wrong so suddenly. It was unfair for what was just a joke.

"Perhaps," he thought, "I should give in and give a list of names to Stilson." He knew that it would make his parents happy and solve all the problems. After finishing breakfast he stood noticing that his bare feet felt cold on the stone floor of the cottage kitchen. Looking down he noticed that his dressing gown was open and not tied. He blushed when he realised that the postman must have seen him in his boxers. That thought spurred him into action. He realised that he was walking around in a daydream. He knew his mother would say that dreaming doesn't get the garden dug.

He left the kitchen, showered and got properly dressed. He had decided to go fishing for the rest of the day. He knew that standing on the bank of the stream for the day in the sunny weather would help him think things through much better than moping around in the house alone. He had some bait maggots in a bait box in the fridge, much to his sister's disgust, so he might stand a chance of catching one of those large timid Roach fish in the nearby stream. Leaving a note for his parents on the kitchen table he grabbed a bottle of water and his tackle from the untidy garden shed then set off for the stream.

For some reason the fish were being cautious today. He had a few bites at the bait and a couple of bobs of the fishing float but he caught nothing large. He did catch a few tiny inexperienced fish but he released those straight away. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon he was beginning to feel hungry and thought it was time to go home. He was feeling much calmer now and was ready to face the arguments with his parents over his refusal to name the other boys involved in the prank. He had thought about giving in, but soon realised that no way could he face his friends if he got them into trouble just to save his own skin. After all it was his idea originally and he had done most of the planning. The despair of the morning had now gone. He had decided to face his new path in life without worry.

He arrived home to find the back door open and his mother in the kitchen.

"So how are you feeling now? I notice you didn't have time to tidy the breakfast things from the table. Did you catch anything?"

"Sorry mum, I wasn't awake properly this morning when I left. Did you see the letter from school?"

"Yes I did. It was no real change from what we already knew. They did say that

there are some unfilled places at Davison High. I really don't want you going there. There is so much more travel and their results are not so good."

"Mom, I'm not changing my mind on this."

"We'll see what your father has to say tonight. Meanwhile go get your lunch from the fridge and then tidy that garden shed. I'm busy cleaning the house if we are having a stranger visit us this evening."

Adam had forgotten about that guy who had phoned last night. He grinned at the thought of his mother having to clean the house. She always kept it spotless. He grabbed his lunch from the fridge and sat to eat it. Mindful of his mother in the house he even washed the plate afterwards. Knowing that if he cleaned the shed it would put him in his mother's good books he went to the garden and got stuck into the tedious tidying of the garden shed. He built a pile of junk to be taken to the local tip and carefully organised all of the tools in a logical order. He knew that his parents would not understand the logic of his organisation and would be continually asking him where he had hidden the tools. That was just the price they had to pay for his assistance. By the time he had finished reorganising the garden shed both his sister and father had arrived home.

"Adam, go have a wash and put clean clothes on. You are filthy from doing the shed. I'm not having you running around the house in dirty clothes when there is a visitor."

"Err ok Mum. Dad, do you want to check out the shed first?"

"No, thanks for tidying it out, but you can show me at the weekend. We have more important things to discuss this evening. We'll see what this Mr Robertson has to say first then we will talk about you apologising and staying at your current school. He will be arriving in 30 minutes, but I don't see what he can do to help solve the problem."

"Ok Dad, I'll only be 5 minutes."

"Please remember to use soap and water and not leave the dirt all over the towels. I've only just changed them all. Don't forget to put your dirty clothes in the basket."

Adam climbed the stairs. He knew that this was going to be a tough evening, but no way was he going to give in. As he walked past Gilly's bedroom at the back of the cottage he noticed she was at the desk working on her homework.

"Hi Troll Face. How was school today?"

"Troll Face" was the cruel family nickname given to his sister from when she was a baby. It was totally wrong as she was in fact a pretty girl, but it was only used by the family as a term of affection.

"It was ok I guess. So Mr Hero, are you going back to school? I had some of the girls in class ask about you. I think you have a fan club. But, I know that mom is going to give you a real tough time if you don't apologise to Stilson. I even had my class teacher ask me if I knew who was involved in the prank."

“That’s not fair. What did you tell her?”

“I said that you were a dork with the brain of a hamster and couldn’t remember that far back.”

“Thanks for that vote of support Sis!”

“At least it got her off my back. So are you going to give in?”

“No way.”

“Even if it means going to Davison High?”

“Nope.”

“Ah well good luck with Mom tonight. I hope there won’t be too much blood on the kitchen floor afterwards.”

Adam turned and went to the bathroom to shower and then changed into clean clothes. It was 7 p.m. by the time Adam had finished and dried his hair. He looked out of the front window to see a black Range Rover arrive outside in the lane. It had dark smoked windows so he couldn’t see inside the car. He recognised that it was a sports version and its engine rumble sounded like the V8 petrol engine. A tall grey haired man got out from the rear passenger door, clearly speaking to the driver as he left the car. Adam realised that it must be the mysterious Mr Robertson. He was dressed in a charcoal grey business suit and wore sunglasses. The man carried a black leather brief case.

Adam rattled down the stairs to greet the man, but by the time that he reached the door his father had gone out through the front door to greet the man on the garden path. After briefly discussing the pretty roses in the garden they turned and headed to the house. His father noticed Adam standing at the door way.

“Ah Mr Robertson, let me introduce you to the cause of your visit, my son Adam.”

The man stretched out his right hand to Adam. As they shook hands the man spoke.

“Adam, I’m Robertson. I’ve heard a lot about you. I thought it was the ideal time that we met.”

He spoke with a deep unhurried voice. Adam could not place the accent, possibly it had a hint of a Yorkshire accent, but it was precise like a radio announcer. He was a bit puzzled that a total stranger had heard a lot about him. The man had startling blue eyes. In fact the rest of the face seemed anonymous. People meeting Robertson for the first time always remembered his blue eyes.

“I’m ah .. pleased to meet you Mr Robertson.”

Gordon Cranford guided the stranger into the sitting room of the cottage. It was sparkling clean with fresh flowers on the side table. Amanda Cranford showed Mr Robertson to an arm chair. He turned down the offer of a cup of tea. Adam was perched on a hard wooden chair. They all sat not sure who should break the silence. It was Robertson who spoke first.

“You will be wondering who I am and whom I represent. I will explain and try not

to take too much of your time. You are going to have some important decisions to make tonight. Those decisions will potentially affect Adam for the rest of his life. We were going to wait a little longer before making contact, but the weekend's events have given us reason to act sooner."

As he spoke he opened the leather brief case and extracted a thick green cardboard document folder. Adam could see his name written on a label on the front of the folder. The man opened the folder and pulled out two printed brochures. Each contained about 20 colour printed pages. He passed them to Adam's parents.

"These will help answer your questions that will arise after I have left. They also contain contact details so you can phone us to make further arrangements as the need arises. Firstly you should know that I am the representative of a charitable foundation. It is called the Foundation of Honour but most people just call it the 'The Foundation'. We like to keep a low profile but we have been around for a few hundred years. One of our purposes is to recognise young men of exceptional potential and to assist them to achieve their maximum potential during their lives. Each year we select ten such people from each county in the UK and provide assistance. We have a large research program and contact network that helps us to identify such candidates. This programme is by invitation only and ensures that the young man does not have any lack of resources to achieve his full potential. It will also mean attending training sessions at least once a week, but that will not interfere with school work."

"Thanks Mr Robertson, I think I understood most of that but what does it really mean to me?" interrupted Adam.

The man smiled.

"Yes, I remember in your file that it said that you are not afraid to speak bluntly. To explain the immediate opportunity for you, what we are prepared to provide, subject to a couple of conditions, is full funding of your attending Holliston's Grammar School. We will also take such measures necessary to ensure that you are offered a place at that school."

"But, why me? I've just been thrown out of my current school, though I guess you already know that. Holliston's won't want to take someone like me."

"Adam, like I said we already know a lot about you. We know that you are stubborn and that you are a rebel. We also think that you have a lot of potential. We know the real reason why you were asked to leave the scout troop, we know about that charity event you helped organise. We also know how much preparation you put into organising those photographs of your headmaster's car in his study. It is obvious that you have good leadership potential and that you are willing to stand up for your team. With some training and guidance we know that we can channel your energy to be doing great things and to the benefit of society."

"What do I have to do in return? It's going to cost you a lot of money and it might be wasted."

"All we ask is that you work hard, attend the training and be honest to yourself.

We have been providing this support for many years for hundreds of young men. We rarely get it wrong. We rarely have failures. If you find that you don't like it all you have to do is walk away. There is no other commitment."

"So I can stop doing the training after 3 months and still go to Grammar School?"

The boy noticed the man's blue eyes harden a little in expression. Not in annoyance, but more like an opponent in a Chess Match.

"Of course you can Adam, but don't expect us to continue the funding."

"So how long does the 'training' take?"

"Oh, not too long. Just a day a week and three weeks in summer camp. You will enjoy it."

Adam quickly calculated the impact on his life style.

"A day a week? Wow. That's harsh. What type of training? Who pays for summer camp?"

"Adam if you want to achieve you will have to work hard. The choice is down to you. This is not like school. We will not treat you like a child. The training is both physical and educational. It will teach you how to reach your maximum potential. As to summer camp we pay all costs and all you have to provide is your body."

"You mentioned conditions Mr Robertson?"

The man smiled again.

"Good I'm glad that you spotted that, though it doesn't surprise me. Firstly you must write a full apology to Mr Stilson. Secondly you must attend a meeting with the Principal of Holliston's at 2 p.m. tomorrow afternoon and convince her that you are prepared to work hard and be an asset to their school. Thirdly if there are any costs arising from your mini car stunt you have to personally earn the money to pay those costs and not your father."

"I don't have to name the other boys in the Mini Car event?"

"No you don't. You know that the entire event was really your responsibility so I see no reason for them to get into trouble. Even those people who you might be thinking gave you away to Mr Stilson. Sometimes things are different from what they seem."

"Deal! When do I start?"

Adam's parents sat with mouths agog that their son had taken over the negotiations with this man and had arranged himself a place at the prestigious local Grammar School. Amanda Cranford realised she should perhaps intervene and bring some control to the proceedings.

"There are a couple of things we need to clear up. This is all rather sudden; we should really take a little longer to consider the options. With all due respect Mr Robertson we know nothing about you and your organisation. We need to find out more. There is also the ultimatum from Mr Stilson the Headmaster of Adam's current school. That expires tomorrow morning. There is no way I can get Adam

a new uniform for the new school in time.”

“Don’t worry Mrs Cranford. If you let me have the documents that the school sent you today I’ll pass them over to our lawyers tonight and they will be on to the local education authority first thing in the morning. The school will have the ultimatum extended by a week or face an expensive court session. I just need you and Mr Cranford to sign this lawyer appointment document; you will not be charged any fees. If you call the contact numbers in the brochures I can arrange for a car to take you to our headquarters in London. You can also meet other parents of young men whom we have helped. New school uniforms will not be a problem we are used to making those arrangements.”

“Thank you very much Mr Robertson. I guess we had best read these brochures and contact you tomorrow. Adam what do you say to Mr Robertson?”

“Thanks Mr Robertson. I’m off upstairs to write the apology to Mr Stilson. Do I have to deliver it in person?”

“Yes Adam, I’m afraid so. Just wait one moment before you leave us.”

The tall man opened his briefcase and lifted out a box. It was a computer games program, one that Adam had seen before but could not afford. The man offered it to the boy.

“As a welcome to our organisation we like to provide a gift. It has been personalised ready for you. You will find a user identity code and password inside the box.”

“Kewl Mr Robertson, thank you very much.”

With that Adam dashed upstairs to his bedroom to write the apology letter to Mr Stilson. He knew that it had to be a real apology and it had to be polite. During his short conversation with Mr Robertson he had got the feeling that while the Foundation was generous they expected him behave responsibly. He sat at his PC and started some word processing software. He knew that it was going to be hard to write an apology to a man that he hated.

In the room below the man was continuing to speak with Adam’s parents.

“You will have found this offer rather sudden, but let me assure you that it is a genuine offer. We will need a firm decision from your family that you want to go ahead with this by the end of the week. Details are in the brochure, but what we will do is set up a trust fund for Adam to help him through school and university. You are not allowed to directly benefit from the funding yourselves, though as you come to learn more about the Foundation you are welcome to provide support for its activities.

One more thing is that we have found over the years that we can work much more effectively if we work on the basis of some secrecy. So we would be obliged if you mention no details of this offer to anyone else. Feel free to have the paperwork checked over by your solicitor and please do take up our offer to visit the headquarters in London. Here is my card. You can call me on this number at any time of the day if you have any worries about Adam’s training.”

“Mr Robertson, did you mention university?” queried Gordon Cranford.

“Yes I did. If Adam chooses to go to university we will fund his way through the university years. We will help you and him chose the best course.”

“But why do you do this? What does your Foundation gain?”

“That is a question that we never answer. The reason will become obvious in good time. Now I am afraid that I must leave you and go to my next meeting.”

Adam saw him leave the cottage and enter the Range Rover that had waited outside. As he opened the door of the vehicle he turned and waved to Adam. Returning the wave the boy heard his parents calling him from downstairs to come down and talk to them. He had wanted to try out the new game on his PC, but that would have to wait. Before he left his bedroom he saved the wording of the apology displayed on the screen of his PC.

Dear Mr Stilson,

I wish to sincerely tell you that I cannot apologise enough for having been caught in the picture of your Mini in your Study. Let me say that we took great care to cause no damage or inconvenience to you.

I regret to say that I am unwilling to name the other people involved so I will take full responsibility for the event. I have discussed the matter with my parents and we have decided it is best that I no longer enjoy the opportunities of going to your school. We will make alternative arrangements for my education.

I hope that this will see closure of the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Adam Cranford

Adam found his parents each reading through the brochures that Mr Robertson had left behind.

“What do you think Mom?”

“It all seems too good to be true, but the Foundation seems real enough. If it turns out to be true it would solve a lot of problems. Do you think you can cope with all of the work at Holliston’s? It will be a different exam board and they get a lot more homework.”

“Yeh, if it means getting away from Stilson I’d do five hour’s homework every night. Does it say anything more about the training that Mr Robertson was talking about?”

“It looks like you have to go to meetings on Friday evenings and Sunday mornings every week. They say you also get support for fitness training in Karate or whatever is available in the area.”

“I don’t know how they found out about me and the mini car so quickly. Dad, did you see the size of that file that he had about me? They must have been keeping

records for ages.”

“I’m not sure Adam. I’ve never heard of them before. I guess we can do a search on the Internet. They have got a web site listed in the brochure. He did ask us not to mention this to other people outside of the family. How do you feel about it?”

“I love it Dad. It couldn’t have come at a better time could it?”

“Right well you had best get that apology written. Your mother can go along when you meet the Principal of Holliston’s. If it all goes wrong you won’t have lost much. All I can say is that you have been very lucky.”

“Ok, I’ll go print the letter. I’ve already thought of what to say.”

Adam left the room. Gilly was sitting on the stairs.

“Ok bro. Tell me what is happening. I always get left out from the discussions. Gimme the Goss?”

“I’ve got six months detention at a Youth Offender’s Centre.”

Gilly gave a gasp of horror at the harsh treatment of her brother, and then at the last moment caught a hint of a grin on her brother’s face. Adam was desperately trying to keep a straight face. She thumped him hard on his arm. For a petite girl she sure packed a hard punch.

“Oh you beast. You deserve a whole year in prison. Come on tell me the truth.”

Rubbing his sore upper arm he told her what had happened and how he would be going to Holliston’s school.

“You are so lucky. You do it every time don’t you? You fall in the muck pile and come up smelling of roses. That means we won’t be going to the same school anymore.”

“Oh I feel sorry for the school. You going there alone without a big brother to keep you under control.”

She pulled her hand back forming a fist ready to strike again. This time however Adam was ready and dodged the blow to dash upstairs. In his room he noticed that there was a text on his mobile phone. It was from Bill.

“W8td 4 u but no sho??”

Adam cursed as he suddenly realised that he had forgotten that he’d arranged to meet Bill on the Village Square at 7pm that evening. He punched the speed dial code for his friend. It was answered quickly.

“Hey Bill wassup?”

“Adz, a fine mate you are leaving me hanging around on the Square waiting for you all night? What happened?”

“I gave into Mom and Dad. I have agreed to apologise to Stilson. Then I’m going down to the Police Station to do a deal for leniency with a full list of the names of the boys involved. You are all probably going to be arrested tomorrow morning for car theft and Breaking and Entering. I will get off with a warning by cooperating

with their enquiries.”

There was a silence at the other end of the phone call for a few seconds.

“You liar! Come on tell me? What really happened?”

“Ok, so I am apologising by letter to Stilson, but I’m not coming back. I’m not giving away any of the names of who was involved.”

“So where are you going to go to school? Surely not Davison High? You might as well come back here.”

“What and have to get all you guys into trouble just so I can come back?”

“But Davison High is miles away and they have got gangs there.”

“No, I’m going to wear the Five Buttons,” responded Adam. He was referring to the unusual five solid brass buttons that distinguished the front of school blazers for pupils in Holliston’s Grammar School.

“No way.”

“Yes way. Someone that Dad knows is helping fix it up.”

Adam remembered that he was expected to keep arrangements of the deal confidential.

“But what about the entrance exams?”

“That is all sorted apparently. I just have to go for an interview with the Head tomorrow.”

“That is so cool. Adz I don’t know how you do it but you always seem to get a good result from total chaos. At least the rest of us can breathe easy now. I bet old Stilson will be stomping round the school for weeks when he learns that he won’t find who did it. He is going to go crazy when he hears that you are going to Holliston’s and have escaped him. You’ll still stay friends with me even though you are going to the posh school won’t you?”

“You bet I will. After all we do live in the same village. You want to come over tomorrow afternoon after school? You can tell me how Stilson is reacting. He will have probably heard by the end of the day.”

“Yeh sounds good, just remember to call me this time if you have been called away to Buckingham Palace to meet the Queen. I don’t want to turn up at an empty house.”

“I don’t know if I can spare the Queen the time, I’m kinda busy. Ok see you tomorrow. I can show you the new computer game that I’ve just got today. I can’t wait to try it. No homework tonight unlike you.”

“Hah, speak to you later.”

Bill ended the call and Adam picked up the new computer game box then started to read the description printed on outside of the box.