

TRUST NO ONE. QUESTION EVERYTHING.

THE LAST VARIABLE

THE TRUTH
IS THE MOST
DANGEROUS
MISSION.

TOP SECRET



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Grade 8

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Dedication

Thank you to my dear parents, teachers, sisters,
and others for their unwavering support,
guidance and love.

This work is a testament of my gratitude and
appreciation for the invaluable roles you have
played in my life.

Thank you everyone for sharpening my journey.
To my beloved parents, loving sisters, my family,
well-wishers and teacher with all love.

Foreword

In an increasingly complex global future, the "Hemamala Upahara" book project, led by Mahamaya Girls' College, stands as a turning point in girls' education. Over a decade, it has successfully nurtured thousands of children to become young authors.

This year, by collaborating with other schools, we aimed to provide students with a wealth of new experiences. The goal was to develop multi-faceted skills, including communication, values, and creative growth. As a result, children have written books that pay tribute to Princess Hemamala, who brought the Sacred Tooth Relic—the supreme symbol of the Buddhist world—to the Hill Country (Kandy).

I extend my gratitude to everyone involved, including the students who contributed their creativity and the teachers who guided them.

Shashikala Senadhira

Principal

Mahamaya Girls' College

Congratulatory Message

It is a great honor for me, as the Governor of the Central Province, to send a congratulatory message for the launch of the books created through the Hemamala Tribute Book Creation Project initiated by Mahamaya Girls' College, Kandy.

Education is the fundamental foundation for the progress of society, and it is further strengthened through books and literary creations. It is clearly commendable that students' talents, creativity, and intellectual abilities are emerging through projects such as this.

I believe that this book creation project will provide valuable knowledge and a precious literary contribution not only to the students but to the entire society. Furthermore, I hope that through such efforts, future writers who will bring pride to Sri Lanka will emerge.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation and blessings to the Principal, the academic staff, the students, and everyone involved who dedicated themselves to this successful endeavor. I wish this project and the book launch ceremony great success.

Sarath B.S. Abeykoon

Governor, Central Province

Emeritus Professor, University of Peradeniya

2026-05-10

Congratulatory Message

I highly appreciate the noble and outstanding effort of the Principal and the academic staff of Mahamaya Girls' College, Kandy, and the student daughters, the students of other participating schools, and everyone who dedicated themselves to plan and implement this book publication project. The project was organized under the leadership of Mahamaya Girls' College, Kandy, with the participation of other schools in the Kandy Zone, with the aim of encouraging children toward book creation within the current school system, as a tribute to Hemamala Kumariya who brought the Sacred Tooth Relic to Sri Lanka.

For several decades, Sri Lanka has been committed to providing free, compulsory, quality, and equitable education to all children, thereby producing a future generation of intelligent and skilled citizens. In such a context, this book creation program for school children helps develop creative ability, critical thinking, and other positive qualities for a balanced and well-rounded personality, and contributes to building a future knowledge-based society.

May all activities of the Hemamala Tribute Book Creation Project be successful through the blessings of the Sacred Tooth Relic.

**Pradeep Nilanga Dela
Diyawadana Nilame,
Sri Dalada Maligawa.**

Content

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The Black Star Directive Revealed
The First War Signal
The Last Variable

THE LAST VARIABLE

PROLOGUE: THE ERASURE

They never called it an assassination.

Not officially.

In the records that mattered, it was described as *a containment failure correction event*.

A clean phrase. A sterile phrase.

A lie.

Inside a sealed room deep beneath an undisclosed facility, a man watched three screens.

On each screen, a different city burned in silence.

No alarms.

No witnesses.

No names left behind.

Only numbers changing.

“The Connors file is still active,” one voice said through the speaker.

The man didn’t look away.

“Impossible,” another replied. “We erased the entire line.”

A pause.

Then—

“Not entirely.”

The man finally spoke.

His voice was calm.

Measured.

Dangerous in its restraint.

“Then we finish it properly this time.”

On the table in front of him lay a symbol.

A black star crossed with an X.

He tapped it once.

Light flickered across the room.

And somewhere far away—

A boy named Caine Connors was about to learn that his life had never been his own.

CHAPTER 1: THE BOY WHO WASN'T SEEN

Caine Connors grew up in a house that had everything except presence.

The rooms were full.

The people were empty.

His father, Ben Connors, left before sunrise most days. When he returned, it was after Caine had already gone to bed.

His mother, Mary Connors, spoke softly when she spoke at all, but most of her words were directed at schedules, calls, and unseen responsibilities.

Caine learned early that asking questions only created silence.

So he stopped asking.

At school, he existed at the edge of attention.

Not important enough to notice.

Not interesting enough to remember.

Bullies filled that space instead.

Pain became routine.

Silence became habit.

Only Vera broke that pattern.

She remembered everything.

When he ate.

When he slept.

When he came home with bruises he never explained.

She never pushed too hard.

Never asked too much.

But she always looked like she already knew more than she should.

On a Sunday morning, everything changed.

Vera's voice cut through the house.

"Wake up now, Caine."

Caine opened his eyes slowly.

Confused.

Tired.

Unaware that this was the last morning of his old life.

His parents entered his room without knocking.

"Get ready," his father said.

"We're leaving."

Caine blinked.

"Where?"

No answer came.

Only repetition.

“Now.”

He didn’t know it yet—

But that word would define everything that followed.

CHAPTER 2: BLUE HOLLOW

The road stretched longer than memory.

No music.

No conversation.

Only distance.

Only silence.

Caine pressed his forehead against the window, watching America disappear into itself.

At some point, he stopped trying to understand where they were going.

Because understanding required answers.

And answers were not something his family gave him.

They stopped at a diner.

The air inside was too normal.

Too ordinary.

Caine noticed how strange normality felt after hours of silence.

Then they drove again.

Until the world changed.

The town they entered did not appear on maps.

No signs of life.

No movement.

No sound.

Only fog.

“Blue Hollow Street,” a rusted sign read.

Caine frowned.

“This place is empty.”

No one responded.

Not even Vera.

The deeper they drove, the more the town felt wrong.

Buildings stood like abandoned witnesses.

Windows watched them pass.

The fog thickened like something alive.

Then they stopped.

A house waited at the end of the road.

Old.

Weathered.

But somehow... prepared.

Like it had been waiting.

“This is home,” his father said.

Caine looked at it.

“No it isn’t.”

No one disagreed.

CHAPTER 3: THE HOUSE THAT HIDES

Inside, the house contradicted itself.

From the outside, it looked abandoned.

Inside, it felt maintained.

Too maintained.

Like it existed outside of time.

That night, Caine stood alone in the backyard.

No lights.

No neighbors.

No sound.

Just space where life should have been.

And for the first time—

He felt something he couldn't name.

Not loneliness.

Not fear.

Something closer to being watched.

CHAPTER 4: THE NIGHT OF FIRE

The house did not explode like a normal house.

It unraveled.

Walls gave way to pressure.

Glass dissolved into noise.

Fire entered like it had been invited.

Vera moved first.

Not panicked.

Not surprised.

Prepared.

Always prepared.

“Move,” she said.

And Caine did.

Because something in her voice removed hesitation entirely.

A hidden passage opened beneath the floor.

Weapons waited inside.

And Caine understood, far too late, that his life had never been normal.

Only controlled.

Outside, men arrived.

Not random.

Not criminals.

Professionals.

And they were not there to negotiate.

They were there to erase.

CHAPTER 5: VERA'S WAR

The underground bunker was not a hiding place.

It was a command center.

A place built for war long before war arrived.

Caine stood among weapons he did not understand.

Vera moved like someone who had done this before.

Too many times.

They escaped into an armored vehicle.

And behind them—

The house that raised Caine ceased to exist.

But Vera did not look back.

Because she already knew what Caine did not yet understand.

This was not escape.

This was continuation.

And someone was still hunting them.

CHAPTER 6: THE FIRST TRUTH

Deep underground, a man waited.

Not Vera.

Not Ben Connors.

Someone above them both.

Someone who understood the structure behind everything.

“The Connors line is active,” he said.

“We missed one.”

On the table:

A symbol.

Black star.

Crossed X.

And somewhere far away—

Caine Connors had just become a target the world would not ignore again.

CHAPTER 7: THE LAST TRANSMISSION

Vera found the file in the bunker system.

She wasn’t supposed to open it.

She did.

The video showed Ben and Mary.

In a safehouse.

Armed.

Injured.

“We completed the mission,” Ben said.

“But something’s wrong.”

“They’re eliminating everything,” Mary added.

Gunfire echoed.

“Caine... if you’re seeing this...”

“We’re sorry.”

Men broke in.

Black uniforms.

Black star symbol.

They fought.

Hard.
Precise.

But there were too many.

Mary grabbed a metal case.

Ben stayed behind.

The screen cut to black.

STATUS: TARGETS ELIMINATED

Vera copied the file.

Hid it.

“They were protecting something...”

CHAPTER 8: VERA’S SECRET

Vera stood alone in a secured room.

The door locked behind her automatically.

Her reflection in the glass did not match the calm expression she showed Caine.

She opened a hidden compartment in her wrist device.

A second identity loaded.

Encrypted.

Military-grade clearance.

Her real file appeared.

Not nanny.

Not guardian.

Not civilian.

Codename: SILENT PROTOCOL UNIT 03

Her eyes closed briefly.

Not regret.

Not hesitation.

Recognition.

Because the truth was simple:

Vera had not entered Caine's life by accident.

She had been assigned to it.

And she had failed once before.

CHAPTER 9: THE FIRST BREAK

Caine didn't sleep that night.

Not because he couldn't.

Because something inside him refused to shut down.

The bunker was too quiet. Too structured. Even silence here felt engineered.

Vera stood outside his room for a long time before speaking.

"You should rest."

Caine didn't look at her.

"Why?"

A pause.

"Because tomorrow you start training."

That word changed the air.

Training didn't sound like school.

It sounded like preparation for something worse.

And somewhere far away—

A man watched a monitor displaying Caine's file.

He didn't smile.

He never smiled.

He simply said:

“He’s awake.”

That man was **Adrian Vale**.

And this was the first time Caine’s life had been acknowledged by the system that wanted to own it.

CHAPTER 10: ADRIAN VALE

Adrian Vale was not a soldier.

Not in the traditional sense.

He never fought wars.

He designed them.

His office was not underground.

Not hidden.

Not remote.

It existed in plain sight.

A corporate tower in a global financial district.

Glass walls.

Clean suits.

Perfect order.

To the public, he was a geopolitical consultant.

To governments, he was an advisor.

To intelligence agencies, he was a rumor.

But inside the Black Star Directive—

He was the architect.

He stood before a digital map of the world.

Red zones marked instability.

Blue zones marked control.

Green zones marked “assets.”

Caine Connors blinked into existence on the map.

A new red dot.

Unclassified.

Unstable.

Adrian tilted his head slightly.

“So it survived.”

A pause.

Then softer:

“Interesting.”

Because Caine was not supposed to exist.

Not anymore.

CHAPTER 11: VERA’S WAR INSIDE

Vera stood in a different room of the bunker.

This one had no cameras.

At least none visible.

She knew better.

There were always cameras.

Just not always honest ones.

A voice came through her encrypted earpiece.

“You’ve deviated from protocol.”

Vera didn’t answer immediately.

Because she already knew who it was.

Adrian Vale’s internal command chain.

“You were assigned observation, not attachment.”

Vera’s jaw tightened slightly.

“I didn’t attach.”

A pause.

Then a colder voice:

“You protected him.”

Silence.

That was enough of an answer.

Maria had not just been Caine’s caretaker.

She had been his containment guardian.

A role assigned to monitor whether he would become:

- Asset
 - Or threat
-

And she had already failed to remain neutral.

Because she *felt something*.

And feeling was not permitted in her classification.

CHAPTER 12: TRAINING BEGINS

The training yard was not a yard.

It was a controlled combat simulation chamber.

Steel floors.

Controlled wind pressure.

Adaptive lighting.

An old man stood in the center.

Caine recognized him instantly.

Not by name.

By presence.

This was someone who had survived too long in a world designed to kill people early.

“Attack me,” the man said.

Caine hesitated only once.

Then moved.

He failed instantly.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Pain became instruction.

Humiliation became correction.

And slowly—

Something changed in him.

He stopped reacting emotionally.

Started reacting mechanically.

That was the goal.

Not strength.

Not skill.

Control.

And far above—

Adrian Vale watched the training feed.

Expression unchanged.

But his fingers tapped once.

A quiet decision.

“He adapts faster than expected.”

A pause.

“Proceed.”

CHAPTER 13: THE FIRST KILLING LESSON

They didn’t call it killing.

They called it termination assessment.

Caine was handed a weapon.

A live target was shown on screen.

A criminal.

A man flagged as “irreversible threat.”

“Execute,” the instructor said.

Caine froze.

Just for a moment.

Then he fired.

The recoil wasn’t what he remembered.

The sound wasn’t what he expected.

But the result was absolute.

Silence.

Vera watched from behind glass.

Her hands tightened slightly.

Just slightly.

Because that was the moment:

Caine stopped being a boy.

And became something else.

Not yet weapon.

Not yet monster.

Something in between.

Something forming.

CHAPTER 14: MARIA'S FRACTURE

That night, Vera broke protocol again.

She accessed restricted files.

Her own history.

Caine's grandfather's history.

And Adrian Vale's origin.

She learned something she was never supposed to see.

Adrian Vale had not always been the system's leader.

He had been its failure response.

A man created to fix chaos—

Who decided chaos should never exist again.

And Vera understood something terrifying:

Adrian didn't want control.

He wanted *elimination of unpredictability itself*.

Which meant Caine wasn't just a target.

He was a contradiction to Vale's philosophy.

And contradictions were removed.

Always.

CHAPTER 15: ADRIAN VALE'S REAL FACE

Adrian Vale stood alone in a secure chamber.

No audience.

No assistants.

Just screens.

And silence.

A recorded message played.

From Caine's grandfather.

"You built order out of fear," the voice said.

"And called it peace."

Adrian watched without emotion.

Then replied softly, even though no one could hear him:

"Order is the only mercy chaos never offers."

And in that moment—

We understand him.

Not as evil.

But as someone who truly believes destruction is kindness.

Because in his mind:

Free will always leads to collapse.

And collapse always leads to suffering.

So he chose to prevent both.

Forever.

CHAPTER 16: VERA'S TRUE LOYALTY

Vera stood in front of Caine.

For the first time, she hesitated before speaking.

“There’s something you need to know.”

Caine looked at her.

He didn’t trust easily anymore.

He didn’t trust at all.

Vera exhaled slowly.

“I was assigned to your family.”

A pause.

“Not as a nanny.”

Silence.

“As a failsafe.”

Caine's expression didn't change immediately.

Then:

"A failsafe for what?"

Vera met his eyes.

"For you."

And that was the first time Caine realized:

Vera was not protecting him from the world.

She was deciding whether he deserved to exist in it.

CHAPTER 17: THE BLACK STAR DIRECTIVE REVEALED

Adrian Vale activated the central Directive chamber.

A global map lit up.

And dozens of figures appeared.

Leaders. Operatives. Hidden power structures.

All connected.

All aligned.

"This world is unstable because it is uncontrolled," he said.

"And I have spent my life correcting that instability."

A subordinate asked:

“And the boy?”

Adrian paused.

Then answered:

“He is an anomaly.”

A pause.

“And anomalies are either corrected...”

“...or erased.”

CHAPTER 18: THE FIRST WAR SIGNAL

Caine stood alone in the training chamber.

Blood on his hands.

Not metaphorical.

Real.

The steel floor beneath him was marked with scratches, dents, and faint stains—remnants of every lesson that had pushed him closer to something he still didn’t fully understand.

His breathing was steady now.

Too steady.

Like his body had already accepted something his mind was still trying to catch up with.

The doors behind him slid open with a low mechanical hum.

Vera stepped inside.

She looked different.

Not in appearance.

But in presence.

More human.

Less controlled.

Like something inside her had finally broken—or finally chosen.

“They’re coming for you,” she said.

Her voice was calm.

But beneath it—

There was urgency.

Caine didn’t turn immediately.

He stared ahead.

At nothing.

Or maybe at everything that had led him here.

“I know,” he said.

Vera walked closer.

Each step felt heavier than the last.

Because she knew something he didn't.

Or maybe—

She knew what he was becoming.

A pause filled the room.

Then Caine spoke again.

Quietly.

Almost like he was speaking to himself.

“Let them.”

Vera stopped.

That answer wasn't defiance.

It wasn't fear either.

It was something else.

Something far more dangerous.

Acceptance.

For a moment, neither of them spoke.

The silence stretched—thick, heavy, and inevitable.

Then suddenly—

Alarms cut through the bunker.

Sharp.

Loud.

Unforgiving.

Red lights flooded the chamber.

Emergency systems activated.

Vera's expression hardened instantly.

“They found us.”

Caine finally turned to face her.

And for the first time—

There was no confusion in his eyes.

No hesitation.

Only clarity.

“How long?” he asked.

“Minutes,” Maria replied.

“Maybe less.”

Another alarm.

Closer this time.

Somewhere above them—

Explosions echoed through the structure.

Distant.

But approaching.

Vera reached for a weapon and handed it to him.

Caine took it without question.

Without fear.

His hands didn’t shake.

“Stay behind me,” she said.

Caine shook his head.

“No.”

Vera frowned slightly.

“I’m not staying behind anymore.”

Those words landed harder than any impact he had taken during training.

Because they weren’t spoken like a child.

They were spoken like a decision.

Another explosion shook the bunker.

Dust fell from the ceiling.

The lights flickered.

Vera looked at him.

Really looked this time.

And what she saw—

Was no longer the boy she was assigned to protect.

It was something else.

Something forming.

Something dangerous.

“Then stay close,” she said finally.

Caine nodded once.

Somewhere above—

The first breach alarms triggered.

They were inside.

Far away—

In a room filled with glass and silence—

Adrian Vale stood before the world map.

A single location pulsed red.

The bunker.

“They’ve engaged,” someone reported.

Adrian didn’t respond immediately.

He simply watched.

“Deploy phase two?” another voice asked.

A pause.

Then—

“No.”

The room stilled.

“Let it unfold,” Adrian said calmly.

His eyes remained fixed on the screen.

Because this was no longer about elimination.

This was observation.

Evaluation.

Understanding.

“Conflict reveals truth,” he continued.

“And truth reveals control.”

A faint smile appeared.

Not of satisfaction—

But of certainty.

Because in his mind—

There was only one possible outcome.

The system always wins.

Back in the bunker—

Gunfire echoed through the halls.

Closer now.

Vera and Caine moved together.

Fast.

Silent.

Focused.

The war had arrived.

Not someday.

Not later.

Now.

As they reached the corridor, Caine paused for just a fraction of a second.

Not out of fear—

But realization.

Everything he had been—

Everything he thought his life was—

Was gone.

Burned.

Erased.

Rewritten.

And in its place—

Something new was beginning.

He tightened his grip on the weapon.

And stepped forward.

Not as a boy running from something—

But as someone walking toward it.

Far away—

Adrian Vale watched.

And for the first time—

He understood something he had not expected.

Caine Connors was not reacting to the system.

He was adapting faster than it could predict.

And that—

Was the only thing Adrian Vale had ever truly feared?

An outcome...

He could not control.

And in that moment—

Without anyone saying it out loud—

The war truly began.

FINAL CHAPTER: THE LAST VARIABLE

The world didn't end.

It stabilized.

That was the difference.

Cities still stood. Governments still functioned. Markets still opened and closed on time.

War didn't disappear.

It became... predictable.

Controlled.

Contained.

At the center of it all—

Adrian Vale stood in silence.

The global map in front of him glowed in perfect balance.

No red zones.

No instability.

Only order.

“The system is complete,” a voice reported.

Vale didn’t respond immediately.

Because something still bothered him.

A single anomaly that had refused to resolve.

Caine Connors.

“Status?” Vale asked.

A pause.

Then—

“No confirmed location.”

For the first time in years—

Adrian Vale frowned.

Snow fell over a quiet, forgotten town.

No cameras.

No signals.

No systems.

A man sat alone on a wooden chair outside a small, worn house.

Still.

Unmoving.

Watching nothing.

Or everything.

Caine Connors.

His hands were steady.

Too steady.

Not from control.

From acceptance.

Beside him—

A metal case.

The same one his mother had tried to protect.

He opened it slowly.

Inside—

Not a weapon.

Not a code.

Not power.

A list.

Names.

Thousands of them.

People marked by the Black Star Directive.

People “corrected.”

People erased.

Families.

Children.

Entire bloodlines.

And at the very bottom—

One final entry.

Connors, Caine

Status: Pending

Caine stared at it for a long time.

Then he laughed.

Not loudly.

Not wildly.

Just once.

Because now he understood.

He was never the weapon.

Never the target.

He was the test.

Whether something human—

Could exist...

Inside a system designed to eliminate it.

Vale found him three days later.

Of course he did.

No army.

No soldiers.

No spectacle.

Just two men.

And the system between them.

“You’ve seen it,” Vale said.

Caine nodded.

“And yet you’re still here.”

Caine looked at him.

“Yeah.”

A pause.

“Still here.”

Vale stepped closer.

Calm.

Certain.

“You understand what I’ve built.”

“Yeah.”

“And you understand why.”

Caine didn’t answer immediately.

He looked past Vale.

At the world.

At nothing.

Then:

“You didn’t fix anything.”

Vale tilted his head slightly.

“You just made sure no one could choose differently.”

Silence.

“That’s peace,” Vale said.

Caine shook his head.

“No.”

A long pause.

“That’s fear that never ends.”

Vale reached into his coat.

Not for a weapon.

For a device.

A kill-switch.

“Every system,” Vale said calmly,
“has a final control.”

He held it out.

“If I die—everything resets.”

“Instability returns.”

“War returns.”

“Suffering returns.”

A pause.

“But if you die—”

Vale looked at him directly.

“The system remains.”

Perfect.

Controlled.

Permanent.

He placed the device between them.

“So this is your function,” Vale said.

“To decide.”

No music.

No movement.

No tension.

Just truth.

Caine looked at the device.

Then at Vale.

Then at the names in the case.

Then—

At nothing.

A gunshot echoed once.

Birds scattered into the sky.

Snow continued to fall.

When the sound faded—

Only one man remained standing.

The device lay untouched.

And the world—

Did not change.

Weeks later—

A report circulated quietly through global networks.

“Minor system fluctuation detected.”

“Cause: Unknown.”

No panic.

No collapse.

But something small had shifted.

A delay.

A hesitation.

A moment where control... wasn't absolute.

Somewhere—

A child made a decision they weren't supposed to make.

And no system stopped them.

Not everything was fixed.

But something—

Was free.



Afterword

With the approval of the Ministry of Education, this research-based project has empowered thousands of student authors for over ten years. Educationists recognize it as a program that significantly enhances the quality of school education.

In alignment with modern educational reforms, encouraging students to author a research work is a milestone in this journey. In this digital age of "Smart" technology, the modern school must demonstrate through research that books and technology should be used together. This is because the unique joy a child receives from a book cannot be replaced by anything else.

To prevent children from drifting away from books—which remain our primary educational tool and storehouse of human knowledge—Mahamaya Girls' College has spearheaded the "Hemamala Upahara" project for many years. Its primary objectives are to foster academic discipline, promote values, and pay tribute to Princess Hemamala, who fulfilled a historic mission to empower women.

We express our gratitude to the Principal, teachers, parents, alumni of Mahamaya Girls' College, representatives of other schools, the Diyawadana Nilame, and the staff of the Sri Dalada Maligawa (Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic) for their support.

Seneviratne Mahalekam

(Project Creator)