



**Chris
Malburg**

Enforcement Division

**Deadly
Acceleration**

CHAPTER 1

“Marty, can your mom and I have a word?” asked Luke McDonald, trying to bring out his most sternly serious tone of voice. He and his wife, Martha, walked into their son’s bedroom and both sat down on the bed.

“Ah, sure, Dad,” answered Marty, slowly turning around from the desk filled with his yellow pages of notes and calculus textbook. He was studying for final exams. “What’s up?”

Luke McDonald could hear the sense of foreboding in his son’s voice. He knew what the kid must be thinking. His own father had done the same thing to him two days before his own high school graduation.

“Honey, you father and I have something we both want to talk with you about,” said Martha. Her voice gave nothing away.

“Sss...sounds serious,” said the now anxious high school senior. He ran through a mental checklist of his latest screw-ups. Could they have found the single can of Boddington’s Ale in his closet he was saving for a special occasion? No way. Too well hidden under the collection of used baseball mitts dating back to his Little League days. Nothing unusual popped into his head.

“It is serious, son,” began Luke. “Very serious. It’s about your school work--”

“My school work?” echoed Marty, “What about my school work?” By now he was totally confused.

“Well son--”

“Enough, Luke,” said Marty’s mom. “I can’t stand it. The poor kid is sweating bullets. Yes, honey it’s about your school work. It is perfect. Straight A’s. Honors chemistry, honors calculus, class valedictorian--”

“Yeah, as if that wasn’t enough,” interrupted Luke, “Captain of the water polo team and with a batting average of .450 on the state champion baseball team.” Luke voice faltered.

Martha jumped in, “What your father is so poorly stating, honey, is how very proud we are of you. It takes a lot of brain power to get accepted to college these days.”

Luke handed his son an unopened letter with the Stanford University letterhead in the corner. He had spoken yesterday with his former law partner, now the school’s Dean of Admissions. He knew what news the letter contained.

“Are you kidding me?” asked Marty as he ripped open the single page letter addressed to him. It began with, Congratulations... He stopped for a moment after skimming the page and looked up at his parents. “Whoa. You knew?”

“Just since yesterday, dear,” said Martha. She hugged her son. Tears of joy and pride at what she and her husband had accomplished with their only child filled her eyes.

Luke McDonald rose from the bed and walked over to the window whose closed blinds shielded the desk from the glare of the late afternoon Los Angeles sunshine. “We wanted to commemorate this occasion and your considerable academic accomplishments with a gift. I thought of a watch. But then your mother correctly pointed out that everybody gets a watch. You’ll probably get

many as gifts over the course of your lifetime. Then I thought of cash--everyone likes cash.”

“But mere money is spent in a flash and then it’s gone,” said Martha, snapping her fingers.

Luke grabbed the cord for the window blinds in one hand, “Then we both hit on the same idea.” He yanked on the cord and the blinds snapped open. Sitting in the driveway was a brand new, red Kaito 2-door sedan with a giant white ribbon around it and a huge floppy bow on the roof.

“Marty jumped up from his desk chair. “Whoa. A car! No, way. It’s a Kaito. The SR-71 Coup with spoke wheels and the newest fly-by-wire computerized performance management system.” Marty’s parents both hugged him.

“You deserve it, son. You worked your butt off.”

“You made us so proud, honey.”

Luke McDonald fished the keys to the new car out of his pocket. “Here you go, son. I had them fill ‘er up. You’ll have many cars over your lifetime, Marty. But not one of them will be more special than your first. I remember mine--”

“Go ahead, honey,” interrupted Martha before her husband could gather a head of steam. “Go for a spin. Why not take Julie out to El Burrito?”

Marty grabbed his school’s blue and white varsity jacket from inside his closet, then took an extra few seconds to fold it into a ball before returning from the closet.

Luke McDonald and his wife walked their son out to the driveway. They all hugged one more time. Marty kissed his folks, got in, put on his seat belt and carefully backed down the driveway, into the street and slowly applied the gas.

“Drive carefully, dear and stay off the cell phone,” said Martha as her son drove down the street and disappeared around the corner.

Julie’s house was two streets over in their fashionable hillside community overlooking the Pacific Ocean. She bounded out the front door when Marty drove up. She opened the car door and took a deep breath. “I love that new car smell, don’t you?” She leaned over the console and kissed him on the cheek. Then she snapped her seat belt into place.

“I can’t believe it, Jules,” Marty said, putting the car in gear and heading out of the neatly lined homes toward the freeway. Julie reached into her messenger bag, pulled out a CD and inserted it into the Kaito’s sound system. Marty reached over and turned up the volume. “This has got to be the best day of my life,” he said, loud enough for her to hear. They listened for the time it took to get through the late afternoon street traffic and approach the freeway.

“Dad gave me the letter from Stanford--”

“*He* had the letter?” she asked. They were now through the freeway on-ramp and merging into LA’s late afternoon traffic. The Kaito’s six cylinders accelerated quickly to the 70 miles per hour the other cars were doing.

They chatted a few minutes, listening to the Kaito’s sound system--phenomenal even for the Japanese manufacturer’s low end model. Marty said, “See what’s in my jacket, will you? Let’s get this party started.”

Julie reached into the back seat and fished around inside Marty’s varsity jacket. She knew what she was looking for. Neither were real drinkers. They had talked about how they would celebrate their high school graduation. If you couldn’t share just one beer on a perfect day like this, then when? She popped the

top of the Boddington's, took a small sip and passed it to Marty. After his sip he put the yellow and black pint can into the center console's cup holder.

Without warning the Kaito accelerated. Marty's grip tightened on the steering wheel. He took his foot off the accelerator. Julie said, "Let's not get carried away, Marty. There's too much traffic for any hot dogging." The 6-cylinder sedan kept accelerating. "Slow down," Julie shouted over the engine's roar.

"I can't," yelled Marty. His right foot crushed the brake pedal into the floorboards. No effect. "The car is doing this on its own." He frantically steered around the cars in front of him. He madly tried to regain control over what had suddenly become a guided missile. Amid blaring horns, he finally wound his way through traffic to the left shoulder. The Kaito's newly reengineered anti-theft system engaged.

Marty felt the steering wheel's lock snap into place. There was no steering control over the bullet they were now strapped into. They were approaching the I-105 overpass that arched high over the San Diego 405 freeway 80 feet below. In just a few seconds the Kaito had accelerated to 95 miles per hour and showed no sign of slowing. The cars flew past them in a blur. They sideswiped one pick-up truck but kept on accelerating. Marty's palm pressed into the steering wheel's padded center. The car's horn continuously blared. He had already turned on the high beam headlights to warn the cars ahead.

Marty's right hand reached down to the gear shift in the center console. One last desperate attempt, he thought. He grabbed the gear shift and yanked it sideways out of Drive. Then he slammed it down into Third gear. Second. Then finally, First. Nothing. The car kept accelerating. Marty's hand thrust the gear shift up, this time to Park. Still no response. The little red two-door reached the top of the sharply curving freeway overpass doing 120 miles per hour. With no steering control, its front bumper smashed right through the guard rails. It flew over the three-foot high concrete barrier. It arched out into thin air, its computer-controlled engine still roaring for more speed.

The car's front was the heaviest. Julie screamed the entire way down as the Kaito rotated to vertical on its 80-foot plunge into the third lane of the San Diego freeway. Marty never stopped working the brake pedal and the gear shift until the end.

The Kaito crashed onto the roof of a Nissan four-door, crushing the family of four inside. The Nissan's two front wheels exploded into the cars on either side. Their impact tore through the thin sheet metal, impaling two more people. The tangled wreckage ripped across two lanes of traffic at over 70 miles per hour. It crashed into another four cars, the jagged steel penetrating bodies like the shrapnel from anti-tank rounds. Two of the cars upended and landed on their roofs. Another spun wildly into the concrete overpass pylon, crushing its driver in its steel vice.

The heavily trafficked freeway had been flowing nicely at 70 miles per hour just seconds before. As the drivers saw the horror unfolding before them, they slammed on their brakes, trying to steer around masses of flying metal and debris. Another four collisions rocked the road. Shrieks of metal, grinding of rubber on concrete filled the air. The black, acrid smoke of burning tires and exploding gasoline tanks billowed into the sky.

During the uncontrolled inertia of cars gone out of control, another four people died and ten more were gravely injured. The freeway finally ground to a

screeching stop. People jumped out of their cars and ran into the smoke and fire to help the crash victims.

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CHAPTER 2

Yonggan Zhanshi sat waiting in his private working office. It had little furniture. There was his work table. A sturdy, locking credenza stood behind at stark attention. It held Yonggan Zhanshi's most private files and correspondence. Yonggan Zhanshi sat on an ancient hard, wooden swivel chair with a wood spoke back and solid, wooden arm rests. It was a gift from his uncle, a General in the old People's Republic of China Army. To Yonggan Zhanshi it had become a symbol of worthy struggle--uncomfortable as it was even to him. The discomfort reminded Yonggan Zhanshi that striving, reaching, extending yourself was uncomfortable, even painful. But that the success it brought was sweet.

There were no guest chairs or seating for anyone but him. He insisted on total concentration without interruption when he worked here. The 100 watt ceiling lights bathed the room in a harsh, glaring white. Yonggan Zhanshi's private office reflected the personality of its owner--compact, efficient. It was purposefully devoid of the ceremony that usually went with his position as CEO of *QX*, China's largest auto manufacturer--fourth largest in the world. He reserved that useless excess for his public office on the top floor, in the southeastern corner. There, he met executives, customers for *QX*'s fleet cars and occasionally heads of state who came to visit. He got no real work done among the ceremonial antiques and overstuffed furniture that occupied that garish office.

Yonggan Zhanshi had thought of the company that he founded just sixteen years ago as an extension of his own ambition. Yet he named it *QX*, the foreshortened Chinese name translated into Gentle Panda. The public, of course, ate it up. That was certainly not how he thought of his company's products. Every car he made he considered it to be brave and combative, like him. *QX* Automotive was still smaller than Ford, or even the new General Motors. His company was most certainly smaller than Japan's goliath, Kaito. Yonggan Zhanshi knew from the beginning he would have to build Gentle Panda to compete in the world automotive markets.

He chuckled without humor--a deeply, guttural sound escaping his lips. Well named, he thought, by Yonggan Zhanshi, a man whose own name means Brave Warrior.

It was dark outside--had been for over six hours already. Still, employees hustled about on vital missions to be sure. Yonggan Zhanshi had located his corporate headquarters outside of Shanghai, near the intersections of the 130 and 100 beltways, but with reasonably close proximity to Incheon International Airport--a rare convenience he granted to himself owing to his crowded travel schedule.

Most of his employees commuted many kilometers to work. And work they did. Yonggan Zhanshi slept less than three hours a night. His 24/7 work ethic tumbled down the corporate ladder and flowed out like a river of obeisance to *QX*'s offices, dealerships, its remotest manufacturing plants--even to its subcontractors that made the thousands of parts, that went into Yonggan Zhanshi's cars.

The automotive industry was famous for its iron fist in a velvet glove approach to management. Yonggan Zhanshi had a better idea. Don't waste time with the velvet glove. Work or leave. Dedicate your life to the company. Or leave. Anything less than exclusive commitment and Yonggan Zhanshi could not

trust you. Without trust Yonggan Zhanshi had no use for you. There were no superiors to him; no equals to him--just servants to precisely execute his commands. Failure to meet Yonggan Zhanshi's expectations meant immediate corporate execution. No trial. No appeal of sentence. The offender would suddenly disappear from the company and would likely never work in the automotive industry again. Yonggan Zhanshi would personally see to it.

His special cell phone broke the silence of the small but powerful office. Only five people on the planet had this number. Yonggan Zhanshi waited for another ring, checked the caller ID and then pressed the button to connect. The Los Angeles caller spoke in English. Yonggan Zhanshi preferred English for such conversations as he was expecting to have--especially here in the office where few employees spoke anything other than Chinese. "Speak," Yonggan Zhanshi commanded.

"Ah...yes sir. Chairman, I bring news."

"Of course, you do, or you would not be interrupting me," snapped Yonggan Zhanshi. He had neither the time nor the patience to deal with the obvious. "Tell me something that I do not know," he ordered.

"Ah, yes, sir," said the chastened voice over 9500 kilometers away. "There was an accident just 30 minutes ago. It occurred on a Los Angeles freeway."

Yonggan Zhanshi forced himself to pause a beat. He was impatient for the details. "Tell me exactly what happened, you fool. I need to know this instant."

"Ah...yes, sir. The first car was a brand new Kaito sedan--"

Yonggan Zhanshi suffered through the man's irritating stammer that preceded everything he said. He was excellent at his job. That is all that mattered. Still, it was infuriating to one who valued swift, precise communication above all else. "Casualties?" demanded Yonggan Zhanshi

"Ah...yes, Chairman. There were just two teenagers in the Kaito. However, the way the accident occurred created a catastrophe no one could have anticipated. The car was going over 120 miles per hour on a curve, then crashed into the rail and flew off of a high freeway overpass--the highest in the city. It landed in the middle of the busiest freeway in Los Angeles during rush hour."

Yonggan Zhanshi's quick mind extrapolated the effects. He knew the auto accident would hit the front pages of the newspapers. It would likely be the feature story on the network news broadcasts. At first, the driving public would demand answers from America's transportation regulators. Yonggan Zhanshi could almost hear the cries for explanation of how the freeway barrier could have failed, allowing an out of control car to rocket over it and down into oncoming traffic. "Continue," Yonggan Zhanshi commanded.

"Ah...yes, sir. All together, nine dead and 23 injured. The crash totaled thirteen cars and another seven suffered damage. The Highway Patrol says the San Diego freeway will likely be shut down in both directions for over eight hours. Ah...traffic throughout the Los Angeles area is now at a complete stop."

Yonggan Zhanshi knew Los Angeles. He had graduated from the transportation design school of Pasadena's Art Center College of Design, then from UCLA's Anderson School of Business. He knew whenever the San Diego freeway sneezed, every city street anywhere close caught the flu. The freeway's on-ramps and off-ramps controlled most of the city's traffic. Take just one out and the effects multiplied for a circumference of miles around. "What are they attributing the cause of the accident to?"

“Ah...so far they are saying it was the driver’s fault. It was an 18 year-old kid. The car was brand new. A gift, the reporters are saying, from his parents. It was his first drive. I saw the parents interviewed on television. Ah...the police found an open can of beer in the wreckage. So, the cause was alcohol and kids--a deadly combination.”

“Deadly,” echoed Yonggan Zhanshi, thinking. “And the steering?”

“Ah...sir, the steering was locked by the anti-theft section of the onboard performance monitoring computer.”

Yonggan Zhanshi made himself an expert in the computer systems and their software that controlled every aspect of a modern automobile’s operation. Kaito’s fly-by-wire technology had been evolving for the last decade. It was the best in the industry and the biggest reason for the brand’s world domination. Yonggan Zhanshi’s elegant, efficient system designs were not far behind.

“That is probably what caused the car to go out of control,” Yonggan Zhanshi surmised.

“Ah...yes, Chairman. But there is no way for them to tell for sure. The wreckage is a crumbled mass. Ah...unrecognizable even as a car.”

Yonggan Zhanshi said, “And the acceleration? What do they think caused the car to reach such a high speed as to vault it off of a freeway overpass?”

The Los Angeles connection crackled, “Ah...that question probably won’t be on the table, sir. It was the driver’s fault, so far as the accident investigators are concerned--”

“And the next accident?” asked Yonggan Zhanshi impatiently. “We cannot wait forever--we have waited two years already.”

* * * *

CHAPTER 3

“**Miss Kaito, do not trouble yourself,**” pleaded the flustered accounting manager. He practically ran after her, wringing his hands. “Please, Miss. I will take care of it. I am sure you must have more important things--”

“I am tired of waiting,” steamed Hina Kaito, turning on the quivering accountant. “My father, in his infinite wisdom, sent me to this backwater plant to do a job. I will show him that I can do that job.”

Hina Kaito--Helen, now. Last year--at age 28--she changed her name from the traditional Japanese meaning of young love to the common American name, Helen. She turned her back on her pursuer and strode down the hall, ignoring the whining pleas of the still quaking accountant. Her New York style Jimmy Choo heels click-clicked on the linoleum. It was yellowed with the age of Kaito's Elkhart, Indiana light truck manufacturing plant. Every inch of Helen Kaito's slender, 5-foot 9-inch frame shrieked she meant business. Her raven hair trailed in the slipstream behind her.

Helen Kaito intended showing these corporate outcasts here in the company's smallest assembly plant what the name, Kaito, meant. She still smarted from her father, the company's Chairman, exiling her from New York just because she toked a little Dragon Weed and more champagne than she should have at a rave party. It was not her fault the paparazzi saw her leaving--stumbling, actually--and snapped her picture. Then the tabloids caught the story and ran with it. *Daughter of Kaito Automotive Chairman driving while high*, the headlines squealed. At least they ignored that she preferred a Mercedes over the more pedestrian cars her father manufactured.

Like it was the first time I drove intoxicated, Helen still fumed. She and her entourage did it all the time when they were at Harvard. At least the Cambridge police knew who you were and made allowances. No big deal when they pulled you over. “Nice party, Ms. Kaito? Can we offer you a ride back to your apartment, Ms. Kaito?” they would politely ask. The next morning she would awaken to find her car sitting safely in front of her apartment, courtesy of the Cambridge PD.

The Kaito name took you far, she thought. Why couldn't they just leave her alone here in Elkhart? Let her do her menial job, serve out her time in exile until the media stopped running those horrid stories about her being a party girl. Then let her get back to her real life in New York. Why?

She abruptly turned a corner and stopped to get her bearings. Helen Kaito had been down here in the bowels of the Light Truck Division's accounting department exactly once before in the three months since Noriko Kaito--*Chairman Norkio*--had ordered her out of the New York office. Where does this stupid accountant sit, she wondered as she purposefully strode down the rows of open door offices. They each were so precisely identical that they seemed stamped out like door panels on the Kaito cars. Only the name plates on the wall next to the door jams identified the individual occupants.

Jackson Schilling sat at his desk, still going over the cash account reconciliation. He heard the clicking heels on the aged linoleum vigorously laboring down the hall toward him. Must be the daughter, he thought. He had

seen her a few times in the last three months. New York chic, he thought, then dismissed her as harmless, unimportant.

Schilling had a job. It was a good job. It paid decently. Elkhart wasn't a bad place to live for a while. People were nice. The town was friendly. Unlike some where his assignments had taken him. Besides, there were worse covers than actually using his accounting degree. He kept his head down, working, and his eyes and ears open.

Jackson Schilling--Jack to his recent acquaintances here at Kaito--was responsible for managing the Light Truck Manufacturing Division's cash accounting. He heard the clicking heels stop two doors down, then quickly continue. They stopped again outside his door just long enough to read his name plate, he supposed.

"Explain to me," demanded Helen Kaito bursting into the small office waving a sheaf of computer reports at Jack, "Just why the Division cash account is not yet reconciled."

Jack Schilling didn't immediately snap to attention as most did when confronted by the Chairman's daughter. He had been screamed at by the best in the business. This child standing before him couldn't stand up to any of them on even their worst day. He punched some numbers into the computer spread sheet he was working. Then he picked up a yellow highlight pen and swiped it across the computer report on his desk. The yellow identified one check for \$147,000 written to a single vendor of the Light Truck Division a month ago. There's the problem, he thought, still ignoring the now steaming 28 year-old girl standing in front of his desk. She was just two years his junior but he was decades older than her in experience. This check has no supporting documentation, he reasoned to himself. So it wasn't included in the disbursements report from the accounts payable sub ledger. A problem, he knew. The amount was so small that it got lost in rounding the Division's expenses. That's probably why no one caught it until now. Still, to Jack it was irritating. He was a precise man. He liked his balance sheets to balance. He required things to fall into their proper place. This check prevented that. Write it off? No. Jack didn't like sloppy work--that was the coward's way out. Jack Schilling certainly was no coward.

"What can I do for you today, Miss Kaito?" Jack finally asked without glancing up at her from his computer screen.

Helen exploded, "The cash account is off. It does not match what my banker says is in the bank account." Her voice was gathering volume like a runaway train. "You have fucked up...Mr. Mr..."

"Schilling," said Jack.

"What?"

"You have fucked up, *Mr. Schilling*," Jack said, completing her sentence for her and now looking at her full on. He noticed she wore an expensive black and teal-colored Isaac Mizrahi suit. The colors of a peacock, he thought. He had seen it on TV and remembered the Brooklyn-born, Egyptian-Jewish designer. Jack Schilling remembered most things. He leaned back in his standard issue desk chair and calmly assessed his visitor.

"Well?" Helen demanded, the edge to her voice sharp enough to cut paper. "Have you anything to say for yourself? I am waiting. Anything at all?"

Jack slowly laid down his pen and carefully unrolled the sleeves of his white dress shirt. He found the sleeves and cuffs confining to his arms and shoulders. It was more comfortable having them rolled up while working in his

office. He buttoned the cuffs and immediately felt the fabric stretch tight over his shoulders, down his arms and end too snugly at his wrists.

He stood up from the chair and walked around the desk. He extended his hand. "We haven't been properly introduced, Ms. Kaito. My name's Jackson Schilling. I have been here only a few weeks longer than you."

Out of natural habit Helen offered her hand. Everyone did that. The Japanese were a naturally friendly people. She grew up in a genteel, friendly household. Her parents taught her respect. As she saw it, the problem was when you extended courtesy to others, people thought they knew you. Then they began expecting things of you--good grades, good behavior, demands made on your time. Better to not let them in. Remain aloof, on the offensive. Travel light was always easiest, she thought.

Jack felt the dry, softness of her hand. Then he released it. He looked down at her. He was at least five inches taller and wider, his upper body, shaped like a trim, athletic V. He stood lightly balanced on the balls of his feet. Habit. "That's better, Helen. I may call you Helen?" He didn't wait for permission. Jackson Schilling was not someone who usually asked for or waited for permission.

"I...I...need the correct balances in the cash account," insisted Helen a little too quickly. "Right this instant." She was struggling to regain her supremacy. It was easier before he had stood up and now towered over her. In a country whose average male height was just 5-5, Helen was taller than most Japanese men. This Jackson Schilling was unusual.

"One thing you need to know, Helen." He spoke in his clear, unhurried and authoritative voice. "I am not your enemy. In fact, no one here in this plant is your enemy." Jack knew that nobody spoke to her like this, maybe no one ever had. He intended to shock her with the unfamiliar. "The way I see it, even if you ran back to your father, the Chairman, and told him of all the incompetent employees--especially the Light Truck Division's cash accountant--your credibility is shot right now anyway. He wouldn't believe you. He's probably glad that you're out of his hair. You have just one choice: Stay here. Do your job. Deal with it."

"How dare you," she said. But her voice was thin and lacked the resolve she normally had when dominating those around her.

Jack held up a commanding palm, the size of a salad plate. That suddenly stopped her from speaking. "Spare me," he said. "I heard your concern about the cash account loud and clear. When you interrupted me I had just found the reason the account won't reconcile."

"You did?"

"I did. It's a relatively small check written to one of the Division's vendors. It's about noon now. How about lunch?"

Helen was shocked. No one ever asked her to lunch or to any company social functions, for that matter. She reasoned they probably figured someone like her was inundated with far better offers and could pick and choose where and with whom she went. Better not to risk rejection by one so high on the social scale as she. Besides, there was her relation to the Chairman to consider. A wrong word from her to the right people and everyone knew their job could be in jeopardy.

Isolation was fine with her. The less anyone knew her, the less they would expect from her. She liked it that way. She didn't intend staying here in Elkhart

very long anyway. Just time enough for the press to find another story and her father to forget the embarrassment she had caused him. Then she'd be back in New York with the people who mattered and the clubs that kept them entertained.

She saw that this Jack Schilling--this mere accountant--had not even the courtesy to wait for her to properly reject his invitation and put him in his place. He had already grabbed his coat from its hook behind the door and was walking out the door ahead of her.

"Coming?" he called back over his shoulder.

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[A FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHOR](#)

It is my sincere hope that you have enjoyed *Car Wars*. I normally work in the world of non-fiction. Still, like most writers, I'm a reader. I've always thought that if I ever had the time, I'd like to write an action adventure novel--something breezy and fun that would entertain at the beach or when traveling. That time came when I was recovering from surgery due to an athletic injury (I'm an endurance athlete). Laying there, with Carrie, our Labrador retriever, by my side I conceived of the idea for *Car Wars* and began the book. Over 83,000 words later you see the finished product.

I invite you to review the book on whatever platform you purchased it. Finally, my readers are generous with their emails and tweets. I always make time to answer since I never forget that my readers are actually my employers. If you wish to send me a note, you are welcome to send it to ChrisM@CarWarsEbook.com.

Best wishes,
Chris Malburg