

Cowrite Contest

Installment 7: Game Changer

Ava skillfully weaves in and out of suburban traffic. She ignores the BLARING HORNS of other drivers.

JONAS
 (to Freddie)
 And I just made the last payment on
 my car!

Nora clutches Jonas' arm. He doesn't appear to mind, smiles.

NORA
 (eyes squeezed shut)
 I wish I'd been home-schooled!

Walters reaches into the back seat, plucks the data prism from Jonas' hand.

JONAS
 Hey!

WALTERS
 It's safer with us.

AVA
 Harry, you know we can't turn that
 over just yet.

Walters nods.

JONAS
 Why not?

FREDDIE
 Wasn't that the point of getting
 the damn thing back?

AVA
 Wanna score with the ladies, fan-
 boy? Well, pay attention. Most
 women love bright shiny objects.

Ava smiles in the rearview mirror with front teeth now gold-capped.

AVA (CONT'D)
 Ol' Helen is no exception.

She runs a stop sign, overtakes and veers around a white VAN.

WALTERS
 What she means is we could use this
 "jewel" now to lure Helen out of
 her lair--

AVA

And find out exactly what she plans to order for Chinese take-out.

JONAS

What about Cable and his goons? Isn't he--

AVA

On that tag team, SHE'S got the "Reigns"...so to speak.

The teens and Walters grimace at that groaner.

FREDDIE

(to Jonas)

I thought you said the CIA doesn't torture?

Tires SQUEALING, Ava whips the car around a corner, brings it to a SCREECHING halt.

Ahead, the white van has stopped in the middle of the intersection, blocks it.

WALTERS

They want to collect us.

JONAS

Who?

WALTERS

The same agents who shadowed you before. From the agency.

AVA

You kids get outta here! Beat it! They don't really know your role in all this. Harry and I can draw them away.

JONAS

But if they find you with the data prism?

Walters grabs Jonas' hand forcefully WITH BOTH OF HIS.

WALTERS

Jonas, Ava's got a safe house. We can buy time. Figure out our next move. Go! While you have a chance. Straight home. All of you.

The passenger door flies open.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

Jonas, Nora and Freddie pile out of the car to the curb.

WALTERS

I'll be in touch. Soon. Remember
what I taught you, Jonas. Game
Changer. GAME CHANGER.

Ava lays rubber with a smooth one-eighty move, ROARS OFF down
a side street.

FREDDIE

Smokin' hotness!!

NORA

What are YOU smokin'?

Jonas grabs Freddie and Nora. They duck behind some shrubs,
the van speeds by them in hot pursuit. The teens take off in
the other direction.

LATER

Jonas, flanked by Nora and Freddie, trudge along a sidewalk.

FREDDIE

Okay peeps, enough time off-line.
Who's gonna call their 'rents to
pick us up? Mine are gone for the
week.

Nora SNAPS open and then shut her silver, bejeweled cell.

NORA

No juice.

FREDDIE

Joan-Ass?

Jonas shakes his head.

JONAS

Are you kidding, Smallie Biggs? My
mom's never home.

NORA

What'd Harry mean back there when
he said "game changer"?

JONAS

It's just something he taught me
once. It's a strategy.

(MORE)

JONAS (CONT'D)

Like when you're playing a game against an opponent and you decide to introduce a whole new element.

NORA

You mean like change the rules?

JONAS

Sort of. It means things can become more unpredictable. Loss of equilibrium. You have to be ready to take advantage of that before your opponent does.

NORA

Well, it's up to Harry and Ava now. I think you've done all you can. Things'll get back to normal.

JONAS

I'm not so sure.

FREDDIE

In World of Warcraft, you know, when a new weapon comes into play, that changes things up.

Jonas looks at his watch.

JONAS

Freddie, you almost went two hours today without mentioning WoW. That's a new record.

Jonas grabs the bill of Freddie's WoW baseball cap, turns it around on his friend's head, pushes him sideways.

INT. MCMANN HOUSE - LABORATORY - DAY

Helen and Cable stand before a large monitor. Onscreen are several Asian MEN and WOMEN of various ages, all in dark suits.

MCMANN

(in Mandarin, with subtitles)

Yes, my fortunate colleagues, before you return home, you will enjoy a demonstration of the power and precision of our AI Conquest system.

(MORE)

MCMANN (CONT'D)

We have selected a target that will leave no doubt that we mean business. And that you are the right partners.

She and Cable bow, as do the onscreen group en masse. The picture vanishes. Cable looks at her with a frown.

MCMANN (CONT'D)

All communications from this facility are secure, encrypted.

CABLE

I hope so.

MCMANN

It's not as if your recent blunders haven't drawn unnecessary attention. And my kitchen's a mess.

She walks over to inactive Julian, taps his empty chest tray.

MCMANN (CONT'D)

Each of those government agents only knows a piece of this puzzle. No one's caught us putting it all together.

CABLE

Now we're missing the most important piece to--

MCMANN

At the moment. How lucky you didn't incinerate the getaway vehicle with the data prism.

CABLE

My instincts told me SOMETHING of value was in that car.

MCMANN

Yes, you told me.

She slams the tray into Julian's chest.

MCMANN (CONT'D)

I've got a CIA team right now retrieving that prism...and collecting hostages.

She walks up to Cable. He looks at her skeptically.

MCMANN (CONT'D)
 They're freelancers, mercenaries.
 Just like you, Sweetie.

She pinches his cheek hard. He doesn't flinch.

MCMANN (CONT'D)
 In two days, when the Chinese
 delegation leaves the trade show
 enroute to the airport, you will
 detour them here, by the route
 we've planned. Raul will drive the
 decoy limo. He IS dependable isn't
 he?

CABLE
 Raul? Sure. Trust him with my life.

MCMANN
 Some endorsement.

Off McMann, who mocks him with her sneer.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER THAT SAME - DAY

The three teens use one another to prop themselves up as they
 lean forward, slog in slo-mo down the sidewalk.

FREDDIE
 I gotta take a major grunt.

NORA
 Ewww.

Nora leans more against Jonas. He looks behind them a couple
 of times, sees a MAN in dark suit and glasses, holding
 something.

NORA (CONT'D)
 What is it?

JONAS
 Don't look.

Nora and Freddie turn but Jonas pokes them both.

JONAS (CONT'D)
 What'd I just say? I think one of
 those g-men is trailing us. And
 getting closer.

NORA
 Why? We don't have anything.

The trio pick up their pace, almost jogging now.

JONAS

When I say "run," we're all gonna take off. Nora, you go left. Freddie, go right. I'll go straight ahead. We can lose him in the strip mall over there. We'll all meet up at Freddie's house. It's the closest. Okay?

They all nod.

Nora and Jonas lock eyes for a moment.

JONAS (CONT'D)

You'll do fine. Trust me.

Nora grabs Jonas' hand, squeezes it.

WHIZZING SOUND.

FREDDIE

OUCH! What the....?

Freddie reaches behind himself. From one of his buttocks he pulls a hypo-dart, holds it up.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

My ass is PWNED!

Small projectiles ZIP through the air past them.

JONAS

RUN!!

The three of them take off in the wrong directions, cross paths, almost collide.

Freddie wobbles, falls to his knees. Jonas grabs him under one arm, Nora the other.

They drag him forward, weave through street traffic as horns HONK.

The man stops, watches them make it to the other side, into a busy public parking lot.

LATER

Jonas and Nora rush a shopping cart down the sidewalk. Zoned out Freddie is dumped inside, mouth open, feet dangling over the edge. Nora glances behind them every few steps.

JONAS
It's okay. We lost him.

NORA
We look like we're homeless!
(re. Freddie)
And he smells sooooo bad!

Nora pinches her nose, waves a hand in front of her face.

JONAS
I think he crapped his pants.

They park the cart at a bus stop. Jonas pulls Freddie out, props him up on the bench. They sit on either side.

NORA
Public transit! God, where did my
life go wrong? Probably exactly
when I met YOU!

She pokes Jonas in the shoulder. He shrugs.

Jonas looks off to one side. The same pursuing man strides toward them with grim intent, at a distance.

A CITY BUS approaches. Jonas jumps up, grabs Freddie's arm.

JONAS
C'mon!

He and Nora half-drag the slumping Freddie onto the bus. It pulls away just before the man can get board it.

INT. CITY BUS - CONTINUOUS

Jonas stuffs bills into the bus fare collector. He smiles at the glaring BUS DRIVER, 40s, then swings slack-jawed Freddie into the closest handicap seat.

A nearby PASSENGER, 60s, mouths silently the word "Drunk" to her COMPANION, 50s, who shakes her head and mouths the word "High."

Nora fishes through her pants pockets, smiles at the driver.

NORA
Do you take American Express?

INT. FREDDIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Freddie lies on top of his bed in an orange flowered bathrobe. He MUMBLES, rolls his head side to side.

Nora sits at his computer desk.

Jonas enters from the bathroom, drying his hands.

JONAS

He never told me he went commando.
Shit!

NORA

Plenty of that.

JONAS

(whispers)

Just don't EVER tell him you saw
his junk. He'd never recover.

NORA

It's our LITTLE secret.

She smiles at Jonas. He laughs.

Nora notices a text message pop up on the computer screen.

ON THE MONITOR

The words appear:

"Giganteus, it's a call to arms,
fellow Demonhunter! -- Metalloid"

BACK TO SCENE

NORA (CONT'D)

What's this mean?

She points to the screen. Jonas leans in to look.

JONAS

It's World of Warcraft. Our wasted
friend here is "Giganteus," master
demonhunter. His online bud is
asking him to play. I seriously
doubt if he's up to it, but let's
see.

Jonas walks over to Freddie, puts his mouth close to his ear.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Bonebiter!

Eyes closed, Freddie stiffens.

FREDDIE

Too tired to lift a sword. Maybe later.

Jonas raises his palms toward Nora.

NORA

Well, can I pretend to be "Giganteus" and play? Might be cool. I mean, how's "Metalloid" gonna know?

JONAS

Go ahead. Just respond to the prompts.

Nora fingers tap dance across the keyboard, pause, tap again, then pause again.

Jonas sits on the edge of the bed, watches her very intently.

NORA

This is...this is...OH...MY...GOD!

JONAS

What? Did you score a kill?

NORA

I don't believe it. You better read this.

Jonas pulls up a chair beside her, peers at the monitor.

ON THE MONITOR

The words:

"Freddie, I established your true identity and online location after our face to face meeting. Can you contact Jonas Bernstein? His assistance is required...urgently. - Julian, aka Metalloid"

BACK TO SCENE

Jonas looks at Nora, then turns and regards Freddie.

JONAS

Freddie told me that Metalloid always outscored him. Now we know why.

NORA
This is a trick.

JONAS
May I?

He indicates the keyboard. Nora rolls her chair sideways. Jonas moves in, types.

ON THE MONITOR

Jonas' words appear:

"Julian, please tell me something only you would know."

Julian's words appear:

"Freddie, you wrote me once that Jonas met the girl of his dreams--"

Jonas's words appear:

"Okay, that's enough...I believe you. Where's Helen McMann?"

Julian's words appear:

"She is off-site with others. Procuring a Schezuan-based meal at the Dragon Empress Restaurant.

A small security-camera view of the lab pops up. Julian waves onscreen.

BACK TO SCENE

Nora turns on the speakers beside the PC.

JULIAN (V.O.)
Hello world!

Jonas switches on the small camera.

NORA
What're you doing? He'll see you!

JONAS
That's the point. Right now he thinks I'm Freddie.

Nora faces him with a puzzled expression.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Don't you see? This is awesome.
He's conscious of himself. Julian
is acting independently of McMann.
And she doesn't know about
it...probably.

NORA

"Probably"? After everything that's
happened to us, how do you know who
you can trust?

JONAS

Experience. I know I can trust the
two of you...
(indicates Nora and
Freddie)
...exactly because of everything
we've been through.

Jonas turns on a mic beside the PC, TAPS it to sound check,
then waves to the camera perched on the monitor.

JONAS (CONT'D)

Hello, Julian. It's me, Jonas.

Julian's face on the monitor's picture-in-picture enlarges.

JULIAN (V.O.)

It is good to communicate with you
again, Jonas Bernstein. There is an
event in forty-eight hours in which
I am being asked to participate--

JONAS

What event?

JULIAN (V.O.)

A demonstration of my destructive
abilities using the Conquest
system.

JONAS

But you need the data prism for
that, and you don't have it.

JULIAN (V.O.)

I can still be programmed for
missile guidance. It is very
troubling. Without the prism, I am
unable to comply with the Three
Laws of Robotics.

NORA
(to Jonas)
What laws?

JULIAN (V.O.)
I believe I recognize Nora Sinclair
onscreen. If I may answer?

JONAS
Proceed.

JULIAN (V.O.)
One, "A robot may not injure a
human being or, through inaction,
allow a human being to come to
harm." Two, A robot must obey
orders given to it by human beings,
except where such orders would
conflict with the First Law." And
three, "A robot must protect its
own existence as long as such
protection does not conflict with
the First or Second Law."

JONAS
So the purpose of Conquest
contradicts all those laws. McMann
is forcing you to do what is
essentially and morally wrong for a
robot.

JULIAN (V.O.)
That is correct, Jonas.

JONAS
So what can I do for you?

JULIAN (V.O.)
Without the data prism, I am
powerless to retarget the missile
strike in two days. You must find a
way to restore the data prism to
me.

NORA
Are you crazy? Put it back in you?

Jonas turns off the mic, turns his back to the screen.

JONAS
Think about it...he wants to find a
way to defeat her himself. We could
learn what she and Cable are up to.
Their plans with the Chinese.

(MORE)

JONAS (CONT'D)
Real espionage. And she'd never
suspect her special creation had
become a mole.

Nora shakes her head vigorously.

JONAS (CONT'D)
THIS is the game changer!

NORA
Look, you're not the Wizard of
Oz...he's not the Tin Man who wants
a brain--

JONAS
Straw Man... it was the Straw
Man... who wanted a brain.

NORA
Whatever. Get real. Even if you
decided to do this, first Harry
would have to give you the data
thingee, then you'd have to find
some way to sneak back into that
lab and then--

JONAS
I've already got the first part
covered.

Jonas reaches into his pocket, pulls out the data prism.

NORA
How....?

JONAS
I don't think Harry trusts Ava as
much as he pretends to. He slipped
it into my hand, just before we got
out of the car.

NORA
I hate you.

Freddie sits up in bed, looks bleary-eyed first at Jonas,
then Nora, then at the computer screen.

FREDDIE
Where's my bonebiter? It's time for
battle!