

The idea that things are not as they appear is essential to a spy thriller or any good mystery. With the very good exception of Helen McMann, all the so-called good folks were...really good folks, and all the bad folks were...yep, really bad folks. This must change. We need more of that rush of dramatic energy unleashed by the gap between our expectations of Helen and her real agenda. Definitely more misdirection like this in the rewrite. Otherwise, the story becomes too predictable, flat, and in danger of rehashing clichés of Good Guys Versus Bad Guys.

For instance, what if Ava was really working with Cable when she stole the schematics from Cable's official CIA caravan, trying to set up Harry by planting the schematics on him to take the fall for some future event she and Cable were planning? And what if we learn that to cover his actions with his men (who are really loyal Americans), and to protect Ava, Cable chose Raul to stop the theft because Raul was the bloody worst shot in the group. But he got lucky and winged her and that's why Cable really has it in for him?

Or how about this: What if Harry and Ava are really the ones trying to sell the schematics and Cable and his men are really CIA agents trying to protect National Security and Jonas (and the audience) discovers this at the Act III climax. One hell of a rush of dramatic energy, no?

Regarding the underdevelopment of Jonas's mom and the ignored fate of his father in the first draft, misdirection and surprise are key to this development too and must be employed in the next draft. What if the woman who answers Helen McMann's door is Suzanna Bernstein, Jonas's mom? What if SHE IS HELEN? Or at least uses that as a cover name? Things get very interesting, right? Especially since Harry told Jonas to seek her out (lying on the ground in the ally before the paramedics take him way in the next draft.) Of course, this suggests that Harry might be Jonas's father. And there is a sentimental consensus among many to make Harry Jonas's father. But this will also be expected by the audience. Therefore, we must throw them a curve. What if Cable is Jonas's father? Yikes! Luke Skywalker Vs. Darth Vader in contemporary America?! I kinda like it, but if it's to be Harry, we can't just hand that info straight to the audience. What if Cable claims to be Jonas's father to undermine Jonas's resolve (and blows the audience out of the water with all the dramatic energy that rushes in from the gap between expectation and result) and then we learn later in a dramatic turnaround that Harry really is his father? I like that best of all.

At any rate, you get point of the impact of a major reversal when things ARE NOT AS THEY APPEAR.

If I were doing the rewrite, I would do a variation where Cable and Ava set up Harry while their cohorts are planning to destabilize the American government for their own political agenda with an attack on American Symbols and Institutions

using an autonomous CONQUEST UCAV that traces back to Harry (Jonas's father) and Suzanna/Helen and Julian.

We also need to introduce Jonas in a more dramatic way rather than the humorous but static opening in his bedroom. Moreover, I think Jonas should open the movie (I shall explain why momentarily.)

In this opening sequence, Jonas and Freddie (disguised in all black) should be LARPing at the Spy Museum. This will better set up the pay-off LARPing sequence in the second act. But this opening should definitely mislead audience expectations: Jonas and Freddie should appear to be real spies (or burglars) sneaking around a dangerous setting. Furthermore, to setup the ENIGMA pay-off of the second act, they're trying to get access to the ENIGMA here as well (perhaps for reasons that concern Jonas's mysterious neighbor, Harry Walters, and/or Jonas's search for his missing father) But they're busted by the TWERP and turned in (setting up Nora's revenge in the second encounter.) Thus a GAP OPENS between expectation and result: They aren't spies. They're just playing at it. And they're busted because Jonas failed to pull himself up to the Enigma (a problem he solves one way or another the second time around, thus eliminating the plot hole of the cop just giving them access.)

Once Jonas is busted (I see him hanging in midair as he and Freddie are demasked by other LARPers) we immediately cut away to a REAL MASKED SPY (AVA) pulling herself up onto a Wall? Bridge? Overhang? To jump onto Cable's truck, thereby introducing a variation in the beginning of the heist sequence. But by opening with Jonas, we place him clearly in the position of protagonist, we get a revealing scene sequence with a dramatic reversal, and we get a great contrast between a wannabe spy and a Real Spy. A contrast the audience will immediately understand as one that Jonas will have to overcome before the movie is over. After the heist scene, I would keep the original Jonas bedroom intro scene because of its humor and details of the wannabe boy-spy. And because its calmer tone now allows the audience to catch its breath after two dramatic scenes preceding it.

We should also keep the action within the physical constraints of human beings in the real world. Jonas wants to be like Jason Bourne, not Superman. This is why I would remove the wire and sled sequence in the original heist. Too much SuperHero, not enough human limitation.

And on that note, the Hellfire missile attack on Harry's house has to be revised if kept at all. Hellfire missiles were designed to kill people in bunkers. It would have killed everyone in that house. And the only thing anyone would have heard in advance was the explosion that killed them. If they somehow escape, it is because someone sees the UCAV before it fires and they dash out of the house.

This scene served three functions: Raised the stakes with a dramatic explosion; Put Harry's computer and gun in Jonas's possession; and separated Jonas from Harry and Ava. It could be revised to do the same: Jonas witnesses the explosion a block away; Harry and Ava flee the house, but are injured by the explosion; Jonas discovers the gun and laptop in the wreckage that night.

For the same reasons of realism, we need to revise the car chase scene where the car was shot to hell and torn in half and yet no one was hurt. (Also, ducking into a cool, dark tunnel is not going to prevent heat imaging from spotting someone. Just the opposite.) I don't think we do Jonas any favors if we undermine what's at stake by allowing anything to happen without real consequences to people. Unless we really build up the parody aspect in this story and mock the very notion of people escaping death, we undermine the stakes that Jonas faces. And since I don't really see it as a parody, we have to have someone die early in the story to tell the audience this is serious. And somebody with a name, not some unknown blown up in a truck. I suggest that Cable kills Raul. This means giving a couple underlings real names and character development to take Raul's place.

Continuing with the question of realism and credibility, no real spy would willingly make Jonas a part of his or her team. No way. No how. Too unprofessional, reckless and threatening to everyone involved. So after being rejected by Harry and Ava, Jonas must take things into his own hands to prove himself to them. Perhaps he hacks into Harry's computer and discovers something that Harry doesn't know. Or he bugs Harry's house and somehow tips him off to a real danger he wasn't expecting. Or he follows, bugs or otherwise spies upon one of Cable's henchmen. But the essential thing is that Jonas drives the effort. We just can't have Ava and Harry spill the beans to him because they "like" him.

Moving on to setting, the first draft was too confined, restricted, and didn't utilize the great symbolic and cinematic elements of D.C., nor anywhere else for that matter. Think far and wide. Think Big. Think Hitchcock. Get some serious dramatic action on top of some big symbolic buildings or landmarks. As a case in point, I would move the intro of Cable and the heist sequence from D.C. to Lockheed's Skunk Works in Burbank, CA. This is where something like an a Stealth Conquest UCAV would be developed and where schematics would be kept. I see a key scene on top of Stone Mountain in Georgia where Jonas discovers the true nature of Cable's secret organization operating behind the scenes. Finally my vision of the climatic action of the rewrite would take place on top of the symbolic and cinematic Capitol Building in D.C. where Jonas confronts Cable face to face, and prevents him from destroying the capitol and other important D.C. buildings.

This brings me to a brief discussion of the Obsidian bar and the digitized schematics.

That is, the MacGuffin, McGuffin, or MaGuffin, depending on how the hell you spell it. And hopefully a briefer discussion than the all the time (wasted) caught up in all the confused mechanics (electronics) instead of just using it to drive the story to higher and bigger stakes. But to be fair, the episodic nature of the contest probably prevented a smoother development. But not so in the rewrite. For me, the schematics are just a means to much bigger stakes. Clearly, a Conquest UCAV is no big deal to create for any great power, whether it be China, Russia, or anyone else with an advanced technological base. Selling it to them is not big enough. So everything hinges on what the Conquest will be used to do. For me, Cable and Ava and his cabal of neo-Confederates intend to destabilize the US government by attacking Federal institutions and blaming it on other people (Harry and Suzanna/Helen), thereby using it to grab political power for themselves. So any mechanical and electronic aspects of the MacGuffin must be simple and straightforward: Once the schematics get to Julian, he incorporates them and creates a program (brain) for the UCAV that can be installed via a USB port. That's it. No more going back and forth chasing after the schematics after Julian has seen them. So when Jonas innocently gives Julian the obsidian bar, that's it. Julian has all he needs: schematics + julian = brain program for UCAV. It's now about preventing the brain from being inserted into the UCAV, or failing that, somehow stopping the UCAV from destroying Washington, D.C. And frankly, we've got to SEE THE FULL-SCALE UCAV in action. We can't set up the audience to expect it, and then not show it. Booooo!!!

I want to briefly comment on Jonas's two sidekicks, Freddie and Nora. I'm fine with Freddie's comic dimension that has allowed him to be a foil for comic relief.

On the other hand, I would like to develop the love story between Jonas and Nora to such a degree that her life being at stake is what keeps Jonas going rather than walking away when it gets too dangerous.

As an example for revision, replace Freddie's parents finding Nora untying Freddie, with Jonas's mom finding Nora tying up Jonas. It's not that I didn't like the scene with Freddie. I just think we need more screen time between Jonas and Nora to deepen their relationship. This raises the stakes for Jonas when her safety becomes an issue. It also further develops the love story subplot itself.

Finally, in the resolution, I want to go big. Very Big. I want President Obama to award Jonas the Medal of Freedom for saving the Nation's Capitol from destruction at the hands of the domestic terrorists, Cable and Ava Reign. In the audience, Nora and Freddie stand with Jonas's parents, Harry and Suzanna/Helen.