A Note to the Reader

This is the third draft of my first graphic novel. As in the first draft, the story, dialogue, and panel structure are mine, but I rely on clip art to help the reader (and hopefully an artist collaborator) visualize what I have in mind. I can't imagine that putting pictures from old movies into a draft of my graphic novel does any commercial harm to the copyright holders, but I will immediately remove unauthorized clip art upon their request.

When the clip art isn't enough, I add "notes to the artist" - the white textboxes you'll find in many of the panels. This means, of course, that these white textboxes will disappear from the finished version of the novel, so please bear with them.

If you've got comments on my pet project, are an artist interested in working with me, or just want to meet up at Comic-Con to geek out, please email me at bcaplan@gmu.edu.

Amore Infernale
Story, Script, and Panel Arrangement Copyright 2007 by Bryan Caplan
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Verona, Italy

Night. 2 shadowy figures on bridge.

You know it's the only way.

Figure(s?) fall into roaring water.

Figures sink.
Day. Heroes - the Ambassador, the Firefighter, and the Bionic Assassin ("Khoklov") walking on bridge in secret ID.

So this is where it happened? Stupid girl, trying to kill herself over boyfriend.

I doubt the story is that simple, Khoklov. Her rescuer said he saw two humans fall in. Why can't anyone find the body?

The Ambassador's right. The Verona fire department dredged the river - nothing. I want some answers.

Then I suggest we suit up. Poor little rich girl's psychiatrist will not allow three nobodies to question her.
The Verona Center for Adolescent Behavioral Modification

Miss Borghia... You have some important visitors.

I told you, I don't want to see nobody!

Carmella sitting up in hospital bed, depressed, no make-up.

I can't tell you more than I told the others. I don't remember nothing about last night.

Well, Ambassador?

It's very strange, Khoklov. Her memory's been wiped clean. I can only pick up a bit of psychic residue - the image of a boy's face.

I believe you. But I can retrieve memories you've long since forgotten. With your permission, Carmella...

It might just be her Good Samaritan. We may as well track him down.

Miss Borghia. This is the Ambassador. My colleagues and I must speak with you at once. We're coming in.

Doctor, please excuse us.

Brain wave effect around A's head.

Carmella in hospital bed, head right, A. and F. behind her.
My friends are *never* gonna believe this. I pull the richest girl in Verona out of the river, now I'm talking to superheroes.

Like I told the fire department, I was taking a walk. Looked up and saw two people fall into the river. I jumped in and saved the girl. Dove back to save the other one, but it was too late.

Thank you for your time, son.

I cannot wholly agree. I peered into his backpack. He's got a month's supply of grass inside.

We are wasting time. I'm going back to work. I suggest you two do the same. According to Italian labor law, is still possible to fire us.

B.A. back in secret ID, walking streets of Verona.

He's not the boy from Carmella's memory. There's no more to him than meets the eye.
Please, Maestro Terzini, you seem to have no idea how embarrassing this is for Verona. If your opera is not ready in time...

I'm not going to tell you again. The opera is on schedule. It will be a masterpiece.

Maestro, with all due respect, I am the Mayor of Verona and the chair of the opera board - and you don't even have a name for your "masterpiece."

Mayor, with all due respect, I moved from America to escape insults to my artistry. My contract guarantees absolute creative control. I won't accept less.

Now get the hell out of my office so I can compose.

Mayor, you are agitating Maestro Terzini. I swear to you, our opera will open in the Arena as promised.
The next day.

The Arena is packed with Verona high school students and concerned citizens.

That should not conflict with rehearsal. And put your mind at rest, Mayor Ricci. Verona's premiere will be the envy of the opera world.

Arrividerci.

I pray you are right, Ms. Tikhon. Terzini, I wish I had your diva's confidence.

One more thing: We'll need the Arena tomorrow for the Suicide Awareness Rally.

The Arena is packed with Verona high school students and concerned citizens.
Please welcome the president of Verona High School, and my daughter... Allegra Ricci.

Thank you, papa.

Fellow students and a citizens of Verona, teen suicide is a tragedy that affects us all...

Remind me why we're here again?

This is a suicide awareness rally. I think our mystery boy might give himself away.

With my vision, I don't need special reason to see this girl speak.

But there is nothing romantic or noble in young people throwing away their lives and breaking their families' hearts...

Watch yourself, Khoklov. She's just a girl - and she's the mayor's daughter.

Is American attitude. In Russia - or even Italy - is seen differently.

...A boy who asks you to die with him needs help, not someone to die by his side.
I'm afraid I agree with Khoklov. I sense something about this girl. She's not just very smart. She has an inner strength.

There are probably a lot of human males in this Arena who'd like to make Allegra's acquaintance. So let's suit up - we'll make a better impression in costume.

Allow us to introduce ourselves, Ms. Ricci. We're investigating the mystery on the bridge...

It's an honor to meet the saviors of Salzburg.*

I can't believe the Austrian government's letting Albert Rich bulldoze the remains of old town. He was so guilty.

* See Heroic Mysteries' "The Train of the Nibelung."
Hopefully, we can do better in Verona. What do you think's going on, Allegra?

I don't know, Firefighter. Carmella Borghia went to my school. She not very bright girl. But she seemed far too spoiled to kill herself over a boy.

Still, if there's any way I could help you...

Ax and water cannon on back. Partial of A. on left.

There is, Allegra. Investigate what Carmella's been up to lately. Talk to her friends...

That's a good start, Ambassador. But I think I'll get further by hacking into her messages. We'll keep in touch by email.

See, Firefighter, Ambassador is right. Allegra special girl. Special nerdy girl who keeps secrets from daddy.
Before we go, let's peak in on the opera. I sense that it's somehow connected.

If nothing else, is chance to meet Russian diva Marya Tikhon.

Stay alert, Khoklov.

You want to meet with Maestro Terzini? He's in seclusion, composing.

I'll handle this, Marya. I'm the Maestro's stage manager. I'm glad to see superheroes are finally taking an interest in culture. What can I do for you?

We need five minutes of Terzini's time.

Not gonna happen. I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

But the fate of many could be at stake.

Not my problem! Now scat. My colleagues and I have opera to make.

Man, those guys sure give me the creeps.
Night. A. and F. in left foreground in Italian cafe. Faint glimpse of B.A. clinging upside down in shadows of upper arch, second from right.

I couldn't help notice their unusual heat signatures. Their body temperatures exceed 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

What now?

And I found their minds well-shielded.

Wait for night. I'm breaking in.

Night. A. and F. in left foreground in Italian cafe. Faint glimpse of B.A. clinging upside down in shadows of upper arch, second from right.
Barely visible B.A. picks Arena window lock while upside down, then slips inside.

B.A. runs along the side of internal Arena wall.

X-ray vision shot through wall into Terzini's office. Desk, small refrigerator with lock; no people.

X-ray vision shot into rehearsal room. Four artisans at work with bright red heat signatures.

X-ray vision shot of Terzini's bedroom. Terzini is having sex with Tikhon. She's on top. Both have normal heat sigs.

X-ray vision shot. Mouth open, hair wild, falling over face.

Back to normal vision. B.A. picks Terzini's office lock.

B.A. rifles through Terzini's desk and papers.


Blood.
Now all three heroes are in secret ID, sitting around cafe table in foreground. A. examines blood sample.

My suspicions are correct: It's human blood.

What do we do now?

Get me ten minutes alone with him. Terzini's weak. He'll talk.
No. I can read his mind. Just get me face-to-face with him.

Which you propose to do how? Terzini's a recluse.

Simple. Allegra will help us.

I hacked into Carmella's accounts. She got a new boyfriend a week before the bridge. But no one ever met him, or even knew his name.

Once she started with him, her friends hardly saw her no more.

Great work, Allegra.

Listen, we need another favor. I want to meet Terzini, face-to-face.

God's gift to opera? OK, I'm hacking into papa's schedule.

Niiice. Terzini's coming to papa's office at 11 the day after tomorrow... But you didn't hear it from me! Ciao.

Nerdy girl's bedroom. Allegra at her computer, cell phone already flipped open. Wide shot from behind. Ambassador's word bubble coming from Allegra's ear.
Mayor's office, two days later.

Tell the Mayor that Maestro Terzini is here to...

Fear in the eyes.

Close-up telepathy lines emanate from head.
Quizzical mayor opens door from his office into waiting room, with A. standing up, flustered receptionist at her desk, and Terzini threateningly leaning over reception desk. Terzini angry, clenching fists. Is this an ambush?

1 demand you remove this stalker immediately!

Blind rage. Overrated?! You'll see! I'll show you. I'll show you all!

Call security.

Mayor regains composure. No need, Mayor. I'll see myself out.

60-degree angle shot from above. Whole office visible. Ambassador telekineses flailing Terzini up and out of reach.

His mind was surprisingly well-defended. He's not your usual egomaniac.

Dammit. So you didn't get anything?

Oh, but I did. Before Terzini locked me out, I picked up a mental image of the mystery boy on the bridge. Terzini was a witness to the suicide attempt.

I also sensed that this is all linked to Terzini's obsession with proving his operatic genius to the world.

Ambassador is asexual. Firefighter, you go with me. I let you be, how do you say, "wingman."

Think again. We know his Achilles heel. I've already worked out a plan to draw Terzini out.

But it's getting late. I'll explain tomorrow.

Late? Is beautiful night in Italy, perfect time to meet uninhibited girls of Verona.

I still don't see where that gets us. We have no proof. It may not even be a crime.
Pass. We don't all have cushy office jobs, Khoklov.

And don't party too hard. We meet back here first thing in the morning.

Firefighter continues walking home.
Firefighter.
Don’t look up.
Imp on roof.

I told you not to look up. You're going to have to learn to listen, Firefighter.
Firefighter keeps looking up, frozen in place, glassy-eyed.

Brain wave effect coming from head.

If you want to be part of the cast, you have to take direction.
Back at A's apartment. Still night. Wide shot. Elaborate window array on far left, door on far right. A. walking toward door.

It's me.

Zoom out slightly to add cutaway view on other side of the door. A.'s hand on doorknob. Fireman's water cannon is out and aimed at door.

Water cannon blasts through door, Ambassador flies through air, smashing into window array.

Ambassador mid-air, center, falling. Top right windows smashed, wall partly smashed.

A. lands on his back on top of car, collapsing roof.
Firefighter leaps from broken window onto ground - freeze frame at 2/3 down. A. remains stunned on top of car. Make cars more Italian - smaller, quaint. Add scooters.

Draw in left of street - another apartment wall on far left, closer to camera. Firefighter lands on feet, turns hose on smashed car, flipping it up, making it fly vertically and into wall, sandwiching prostrate A.
Close-up of car flattened tight against side of building - A.'s lower right leg and right hand visible.

F. pulls open visor, puts hand near mouth. Glassy eyes gone. Horrified expression.

F. runs toward building, and fires grappling hook into building on lower left of car.

A. badly injured amidst rubble, roof of vertical car on right. F. leaning over to administer first aid.
"You almost killed Ambassador"? How is possible?

Am very busy now! OK, god dammit, I'll be right there.

I'll be back soon, baby doll. You wait for me, yes?

Still night. Police helicopter flying over city in background. Tiny dot of B.A. in costume leaping from rooftop to rooftop in midground - away from camera.

Lights of skyline out of focus in background. Leaping posture.

Firefighter, we have you surrounded.

Cityscape. 60-degree angle, chopper in foreground, street from last page down below, with many police cars and barricades.

Speaker has megaphone.

Throw down your water cannon. Now.

B.A. on rooftop looking down on scene, profile of head in foreground.
Inside building with car pancaked against right wall. B.A. emerges on left wall, clinging upside down. A. looking significantly better, F. still crouching next to him with first aid kit open. Syringes and other discarded medical supplies nearby.

See, I’m already here. Shut up and listen - I have plan.

Ambassador is conscious already, yes?

Riot police, police cars fill street behind barricade.

This is the Bionic Assassin. I am coming out with badly injured man.

Hold your fire.

Captain, you are making big mistake with Firefighter. Listen to victim's story.

B.A. leaps out, carrying A.

B.A. lands in front of police car, lays A. down on ground.

But several witnesses saw him try to kill you.

The Firefighter... tried to save me. You have... to let him... go.

They are mistaken.
Now police know true story. You take victim to hospital. I take Firefighter away, preventing embarrassing incident.

Wait! You can't just do that!

Bastardo.

Men! Hold your fire!
In dark Verona alley.

Obviously, our cover is blown. Go to hotel, use cash and fake name.

It was awful. I saw everything, but couldn't stop. That imp moved me around like a puppet.

Americans deal poorly with setbacks. Now is time to cut losses and regroup.

First thing tomorrow, we visit Ambassador. Before you put him in hospital, he had brilliant plan to share, yes?

What about you?

Don't worry about me. I go to safehouse.

I told you I'd be back, baby doll. But I have to get up very early in morning.
Verona Hospital, next morning.

Did you bring my laptop?

Yes. But what's this all about?

Just get Allegra on the line.

Hospital. A. tilted up in bed in foreground, F. and B.A. standing behind.

Ciao, Ambassador. How can I help?

I want to start an opera blog. Can you set it up?

Whatever you say. What should I call it?

I'm exposing a man who sold his soul for his art. Let's call it the "Goethe Blog." Email me once it's ready. Thanks, Allegra.

So this is brilliant plan?

Terzini's got a fragile ego and an opera behind schedule. I think if I provoke him enough, he'll tip his hand.

Last time you provoked him, I almost wound up killing you.

I haven't forgotten.

I'm going to modify your helmet to protect your mind from another hostile takeover.
I don't like this, Khoklov. Something very wrong is going to happen. But for the life of me, I can't figure out what the hell is going on.

Wait and see. Perhaps Ambassador's plan will work.

I don't know - there's got to be more to this story than an opera composer who can't deal with criticism.

In any case, what good will the "Goethe Blog" do if Terzini gets his opera back on track? And what makes us think he won't?...

Hey, Khoklov, what's the commotion over there?

Italy is crazy country. People shoving to see poster on wall.

A poster of what? Is stupid poster for some...
Amore
Infernale

Gesamtkunstwerk by Bertrando Terzini
Verona Philharmonic Orchestra
World Premiere - October 31, 2005

...opera.
AMORE
INFERNALE
ISSUE #2
WRITER: BRYAN CAPLAN
ARTIST: ???
Verona - Hotel Firenze

Upscale Verona hotel room. Reflection of B.A.'s hand (w/tuxedo cuff) holding prosthetic nose.

What's my cover again?

You're Count Lombardi, a patron of the arts from Tuscany.

Reflection of B.A.'s hand holding brown wig.

Is quality disguise. You're sure I can't just walk through the front door?

Reflection of B.A.'s hand holding fake beard/mustache.

Allegra tried to hack into the guest list, but security's too tight.

Verona's elite can taste the premiere of *Amore Infernale*. No one wants to offend the Maestro now.

B.A.'s disguised reflection centered in mirror. He furrows his brow while he straightens his tux's bow tie. A.'s profile reflected on left. F.'s profile reflected on right. Word bubbles originate from A.&F.'s reflections.

The carafes of human blood in his refrigerator notwithstanding?
Trio turns around to leave hotel room. B.A. still disguised, back of head in reflection.

Carafes notwithstanding. No one's going to take our accusations seriously until we figure out what Maestro Terzini's up to.

I'd still rather just beat the truth out of him.

At least Allegra will be there. I look good, yes?

Watch it Khoklov - I'll call her father if I have to.

Americans have no sense of humor. What do you take me for?
Four search lights spray out from the Torre dei Lamberti.

Add search lights.

Queue of elite opera boosters. Limo pulls up.
Bombarded by flashes of the papparazzi.

With the premiere of *Amore Infernale* just ten days away, Verona is about to make opera history.

I’ve never been prouder to be mayor of our fair city.

Papparazzi flashes die down.

Trio turns around to enter Torre dei Lamberti.

45 degree view from across the street. X-ray view of trio on other side of doors. Top of B.A.’s masked head in foreground.

B.A. leaps through air toward upper right window.

B.A. scrambles inside window.
Door slightly ajar. B.A. in disguise.

Italian magnate with trophy wife walking up fourth stair from bottom. Half a dozen figures behind ironworks. *Amore Infernale* flag hangs from center rail.

Crowded party. Terzini, with Tikhon by his side, in ballroom center, surrounded by fawning Italian crowd, mostly magnates and matrons.

You may as well quit asking him. Bertrando's so secretive, he won't let me hear my own finale!

Marya, shut up.

Maestro, please!

Verdi did the same. He kept "La donna è mobile" from his lead tenor until the night before *Rigoletto* premiere. I wouldn't expect a singer to understand.

All the opera world needs to know: *Amore Infernale* captures the essence of absolute love transformed into absolute hate.

*Amore Infernale*
Allegra in conservative gown, stands in corner, talking with boy in silhouette.

...my papa, but he never listens...

Allegra...
Allegra... I could listen to you for a lifetime...

Terzini will bridge the gap between the high culture and the modern...

The Mayor doesn't want no trouble tonight. And those superheroes have the bad blood with the Maestro.

...don't be such stupid! I never try to commit suicide...

It's nice that someone thanked me, because let me tell you, our diva didn't!

...That costume you designed, I simply adore it!

I never try to commit suicide...

Allegra in revealing gown, holding drink, losing her temper with two female friends.

Switch to B.A.'s infra-red view, show bright red heat sig on costume designer and stage manager. Costume designer (right) does double-take; stage manager (left) furrows brow.

B.A. wandering through party. Mayor addresses circle of matrons and sycophants.

Police captain facing forward talking to underling with back turned away from camera.
Far shot of Terzini, Mayor, Allegra, Captain, Carmella, poster scenes. Costume designer approaches Terzini, while stage manager moves over and taps police captain of shoulder. Allegra partly in shadow, her hand on boy's shoulder.

My cover is blown. Then get out.

You there... wait!

Captain holds walkie-talkie to mouth. Crowd all looking toward camera. Terzini whispers to costume designer.
B.A., still in disguise, superleaps up and to the right, breaking the fourth wall. Captain, stage manager, and costume designer pursue.

B.A. leaps to top left of staircase, shocking partygoers.

B.A. leaps out of from upper window toward camera, still in disguise.

B.A. on rooftop across the street, wig off.

God, that was close.
B.A. in profile finishes shedding disguise and gets into costume, picks up his machine gun. Torre dei Lamberti still in background.

Two imps flying up side of building; torsos revealed by X-ray vision. One on left has scary bow and arrows.

Aaaeee!

B.A.’s torso visible from behind. Machine gun fires at imps. They spray ghoulish blood from half a dozen bullet holes in each target.

Aaaeee!

Flying imp shoots arrow at B.A. Arrow flies out toward camera.

Damn!

Arrow hits B.A. in forearm near elbow; tip pokes out slightly on other side.

I could just kill you for that awful disguise.

Brain wave effect from head of imp without bow.

Looks like you’re going to have to murder your best friends with your off-hand.
B.A. in profile switches gun hands, then pumps a dozen bullets into mind controlling imp. Bullets cross from left frame into right frame, with ghoulish blood spraying out in every direction. Imp half bursts into flame.

Russian only submit to strongest of leaders.

Flying imp shoots another arrow, hitting B.A. in neck. Other imp is now just a pile of ash.

B.A. falls to knees.

Close up of B.A.'s hand dropping gun as arrow goes through other hand.
Shoots another arrow. Arrow crosses panel, hits B.A. in back of neck. B.A. prostrate with arrows sticking out of both arms. Gun dropped.

Wide shot of Firefighter emerging on roof near fallen B.A., blasting imp across the street with water cannon.

Top of tower damaged; imp splats into pavement.

Imp gets back up and shoots another arrow.
Aaaaaaee!

Firefighter takes arrow in the chest.

Aaah!

Imp nocks another arrow.

Reveal of Ambassador on roof, arms uplifted in telekinetic gesture.

Imp gets splattered by flying police car.

Imp bursts into flame like other one, causing car to explode. Bystanders singed and terrified.

We've got three minutes to save Khoklov and disappear before the Verona P.D. surrounds us.

Gotcha.
Mayor's Office

I want those superheroes in custody until we figure out what's going on!

Mayor, you know we don't have that kind of firepower!

Then what do you suggest I do? Let them turn Verona into a war zone a week before Terzini's premiere?

I'm convinced that this opera will totally change the way that Europe sees us.

Then we have to move ahead with what we discussed.

Sigh. I'm afraid your right.

Maria, put me through to ESCS.*

* The European Superhuman Containment Squad. Pronounced "Excess.*
Euromotel, the next day.

Cheap hotel room, heroes in secret ID. B.A. propped up in bed, with bandages on neck and arms. Firefighter has bandage on chest until shirt.

You're lucky that half your body is made out of plastic.

Not the half I'd really miss.

Well, Ambassador, what next?

I have to go blog.

110,000 hits?!

Goethe Blog
Terzini's Team Falling Apart

The Amore Infernale train wreck keeps getting uglier. Goethe Blog insiders have learned that two key members of Terzini's creative team - his stage manager and his costume designer - have flown the coop. With a week to go, what's a mediocre megalomaniac to do? Are there any reputable craftsman left in Europe foolish enough to link their names to the Titanic of opera?

Not surprising. We got picked up by Marginal Revolution.

F. staring over A.'s shoulder while he sits in front of laptop. Both in profile.
I'm a little worried about Allegra. She's turned off her cell and stopped responding to email.

Allegra can take care of herself. Is time for payback. What do you have in mind, Khoklov?

I hide by Arena in stealth suit. Once I pinpoint Terzini's location, I won't take my bionic eye off him. We keep in touch with cell phone. If Terzini goes mobile, you follow us in car.

A stakeout.

B.A. standing up.

Elaborate.

X-ray vision cutaway into Arena.

Is too good to be true. Terzini is putting on... stealth suit of his own?

You do that, Maestro. To infra-red, you are still big red patch.
Man in stealth suit slips out window.

Verdi has left the building. I'll be safely behind him.

He's going through a few alleys. He doesn't want to be followed.

Now he's entering deserted touristic attraction.

X-ray and infra-red effects.

What attraction? Can you see?

Is no problem. Touristic attraction is...
Romeo's Tomb.
What’s he doing there?

I believe technical term is... skulking.

The tomb’s opening?

No. Figure walks through stone.

Wait, something’s happening.

Figure is emerging from tomb.

Terzini’s greeting him?

No, is still skulking.

Well, can you describe the figure?

Da. Figure is... uh... very handsome teen-age boy.

Stop laughing. Really, boy is ridiculously good-looking.
Big smile and wide eyes on Allegra. Dressed sexier than all previous scenes.

Now what?

Boy is walking back toward Piazza Bra.

Terzini gives him lead, then follows.

Boy walks toward cafe. Terzini still tailing him.

Boy waves at girl in cafe. She's been waiting for him.

Oh my... Ambassador?

I think I've figured out why Allegra stopped returning your messages.

Matching big smile and wide eyes on boy.
Allegra and boy share table together, holding hands, looking into each others' eyes.

Terzini's taken off stealth suit, and sat down at nearby cafe table to eavesdrop.

The pervert is taking notes.

More soulful looks.

Allegra and boy passionately kiss.

Kiss continues. Terzini frantically taking notes.
We should put a stop to this.

Still talking on cell phones. B.A. on rooftop; A. in driver's seat, F. in passenger seat.

Negative. We still have much to learn.

I don't like it anymore than you do, Ambassador. But Khoklov's right - we shouldn't tip our hand.

OK, happy couple is leaving cafe.

They're walking right past the car.

And Terzini?

He's running to alley to put stealth suit back on.

As I suspected.

That's the boy from the bridge.

A. and F. still in car. Allegra and boy walking past car on sidewalk.
Allegra and Romeo walking stage left, holding each other.

Allegra and boy are leaving the Piazza. Terzini is following close behind.

I’ll track Terzini from the rooftops.

You two try to keep up with me.

A. driving, F. passenger. Voice bubble comes from A.’s cell.

I won’t let Terzini out of my sight. Everything is under control.

Night. ESCS agents in car, lights of the Piazza in background.

Francois here. ESCS Surveillance Team #2 checking in.

Suspects now following two unidentified teens.
Night. Allegra and boy holding each other, backs to the camera, profiles turned toward each other.

Happy couple now entering San Zeno cathedral.

Terzini close behind.

Don't worry about Allegra. All three targets in jumping distance.

Terzini sneaking around corner, still in stealth suit.
Allegra and boy no longer holding each other. Both backs to camera.

Our families will never accept our union, Allegra.

I know, my love.

I can't live without you.

Allegra and boy no longer holding each other. Both backs to camera.
We could get married - here, now. We could wake a priest.

The priest will just call your father.

You're right.

There's only one way for us to be together.

Let's wait. There's still time for us.

By all means, my love. Let's warm ourselves by the fire until it...

Brows touching in profile, tears streaming down both faces.
Terzini, just outside cathedral window, has look of maniacal glee while he frantically scribbles notes.

burns out.
Maniacal glee becomes smug smirk. Note pad down, cell phone out.

I’m so sorry to disturb your sleep, Mayor Ricci... This is Father Carlo from San Zeno Maggiore. Do you know where your daughter is?

Maniacal glee becomes smug smirk. Note pad down, cell phone out.

Captain, my daughter Allegra sneaked out. She’s at San Zeno with... a boy.

This is the Captain. All units in the vicinity of San Zeno Maggiore are ordered to immediately take the Mayor’s daughter...

In his office, talking on dispatch radio.

Merde! The girl our suspects have been stalking is the Mayor’s daughter.

ESCS agents in van.

Phone to ear.

...and her, uh, male companion... into protective custody.

In his office, talking on dispatch radio.

This is ESCS. The Mayor’s daughter is in grave danger.

Requesting authorization for an immediate emergency extraction.

Horrified look on face.

I’m so sorry to disturb your sleep, Mayor Ricci... This is Father Carlo from San Zeno Maggiore. Do you know where your daughter is?
ESCS agents in foreground, running for church entrance.

Go go go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!

Romeo! Romeo! Romeo! Romeo!

Back of heads of ESCS agents in foreground. Romeo fades into altar.
You two in the car - this is ESCS. You are surrounded.

Goddammit, Terzini's going to escape!

Not if I have anything to say about it.

A. in driver's seat, F. in passenger.

Night. Terzini, startled, starts to flee.

B.A. midair leaping from top of San Zeno to tackle Terzini.
B.A. tackles Terzini. Gun on back.
F. and A. emerge from car in secret ID, hands up.

If you move, we will open fire.

There's no reasoning with some people.

ESCS agents run down front stairs, carrying hysterical Allegra over shoulder.

You're making a mistake. The man you want is getting away.

A.'s hands switch to extreme telekinetic gesture.

Van flips over, ESCS agents dazed.

We better suit up fast. Khoklov could be in trouble.

A. and F. run from car.
60 degree aerial shot, centered around San Zeno. Show: Flipped ESCS van with doors opening up and agents emerging, A.'s parked car, ESCS agents carrying Allegra running for cover, and B.A. on top of Terzini on side of San Zeno, outside everyone else's line of sight.

If you don't start talking, my little weasel, the Bionic Assassin starts snapping your bones. Tell me: What sick shit are doing to girl Allegra?

B.A. crushing prone Terzini.

By Her Unholy Name, I summon you. Oh ye clever imps, come to your master in his time of need.

Friends, I need backup NOW!

Flying imps emerge from clouds of smoke. Left imp shoots fire at B.A., forming fire rope around legs and upper arms.

B.A. breaks fire bonds and stands up; Terzini starts running away. Imps close in.

B.A. machine guns imp on right, but fire lasso from imp on left throws off his aim.
Imp on right picks up entangled B.A. by his leg and smashes him into brick wall, shattering it and sending his gun flying. Imp on left adds another layer of fire bonds.

Imps jointly pick up B.A.’s limp, flame entangled body. They spin him around at blinding speed, then fling him into the wall of the church.

B.A.’s body and a pile of rubble come flying out the front wall of the church.
ESCS agents, backs to camera, some in profile, surrounding B.A.’s shattered body. They all shoot their autofire energy guns at imp visible over church. Imp half-disintegrates in a burst of flame.

Do you see that thing up there? Fire! Fire! Fire! Fire!

Ambassador! Firefighter! We know you’re still here. Surrender!

Pull camera back. A. and F. emerge from alley. A makes extreme telekinetic gesture. F. fires water cannon. Van and water cannon bowl over ESCS agents, missing B.A.

All units! The Ambassador - drop him.

Pull camera back to show whole plaza. Four more ESCS agents in left and right foreground. A. and F. on far left. Tipped-over van and bowled-over ESCS agents in center.
Panel fills with dozens of energy blasts.

A. goes limp like rag doll, collapses next to F.

Ambassador!

You *idiots*...

Water cannon fires in 120 degree arc, flooding out toward reader, knocking all four ESCS agents off their feet. Hosed agents break the fourth wall.

*he came in peace!*
Your daughter is safe...

F. lifts A. onto his back and starts running away.

Sorry, Khoklov... In rescue work, we call this "triage."

F. ducks into alley with A. on his back; ESCS agents around van start to get up, rubbing their heads.

ESCS agents in foreground start to get up. Ground is still wet. The agents are soaked.

Mayor, this is Francois with ESCS. I have good news...

Phone to ear.

Allegra, eyes puffy from crying, leans against police car. She is utterly despondent.
The Bionic Assassin has been captured alive. His condition is critical but stable.

We’ll chopper him to ESCS headquarters for treatment and interrogation...

The Firefighter and the Ambassador escaped...

but the Ambassador is seriously, perhaps mortally, injured.

We’ve alerted regional hospitals...

ESCS agents carrying shattered B.A. on stretcher.

F. has medical supplies everywhere. A. looks terrible.

And the boy?

Romeo’s insubstantial body laying backwards into tomb.

He was not hurt...

but unfortunately, we were unable to take him into custody.

In any case, he’s just a boy, nothing to worry about.

Great work, Francois. For saving my daughter, you have my personal gratitude.

Thanks to ESCS, it sounds like the crisis is over...
Our people can finally stop worrying...

Terzini frantically composing by the light of unholy fire, his shadow magnified on the rear wall.

and get ready...

for the most exciting opera season in the history of Verona.
Also by Bryan Caplan

The MYTH of the RATIONAL VOTER
WHY DEMOCRACIES CHOOSE BAD POLICIES
BRYAN CAPLAN

"The best political book of the year."
--Nicholas Kristof, The New York Times

Published by Princeton University Press
AMORE
INFERNALE

 ISSUE #3

WRITER: BRYAN CAPLAN
ARTIST: ???
Will he live?

I wouldn't take any chances. Interrogate him now while you still can.

The truth serum won't push him over the edge?

Not according to our most recent experiments.
One eye socket empty; other eye bugs out.

There, you can question him now, Francois.
Leonid Khoklov, you are in the custody of ESCS. Your cooperation is deemed vital to the security of the European Union.

You’re going to tell me everything you know.

Merci, Inga.

Yaaaaahgh...
Ambassador looks severely injured.

Speak.

I couldn't take you to the hospital - we're wanted men. I've spent the last few days struggling to keep you alive.

F. leaning over A.'s body, tending to him.

I couldn't take you to the hospital - we're wanted men. I've spent the last few days struggling to keep you alive.

None.

Now there's only four days before the opera opens, and Terzini unleashes God knows what. Four days to solve the mystery. I can't do it alone, friend.

No word from the Bionic Assassin?

You're wrong. You're forgetting your greatest...

Yes - my superior intellect.

I'm in no position to help, either.
You said Allegra was screaming about "Romeo." Isn't he the tragic hero of an English saga set in this very city?

Correct.

But Shakespeare's story took place centuries ago... and in any case, according to popular opinion, it's a work of fiction.

It's been a while since I thought about it, but yea.

Then it's safe to conclude that popular opinion is once again in error. To solve this mystery, we must unearth the true story of *Romeo and Juliet*. 
Where would we even start?

Who would have been recording Verona’s history five hundred years ago?

The Church.

Then get thee to a monastery.
Strange you should ask.

There's no fooling you, father. I write for an opera blog.

Mama mia, you must be even more excited than me!

The feeling is indescribable.

So tell me, father. What really happened to Romeo and Juliet?

Face turns grim, hands fall.

A far greater tragedy than William Shakespeare was willing to put on paper.

The Maestro Bertrando Terzini asked me the same question a few months ago.
Romeo and Juliet were star-crossed lovers from feuding families, this much is true.

But in face of certain resistance to their union, the young couple despaired.

They vowed to join hands and hurl themselves into the Adige River at midnight.

An hour beforehand, Juliet climbed down her balcony...

and made her way to the bridge.
But that night, Romeo's mother uncovered his plan. Pleading, sorrowful look.

Moved by her tears, the boy renounced his promise to his beloved.

He rushed to the bridge. In her despair, Juliet was prepared to jump alone.

According to tradition, these were their last words.

Romeo, you've not forsaken me.

No, I'm here to save you. Juliet, come down.

We've sworn to die together.

Night. Remove other figures.
Night, remove other figures. Romeo climbs up, Juliet climbs higher and away.

We can't keep that promise. Why? Did your mother find out?

Juliet... Tybalt said you were a coward.

If he was wrong, follow me.
Large ripples in the water.

No! No! No! No! Look of horror and guilt.
At last, the Pope sent his chief exorcist to imprison the boy's spirit...

Freaked-out look.

What... what happened to Romeo, father?

Grim look.

He kept his promise to his mother, but died soon afterwards...

of a broken heart.

However, the story does not end there.

The bodies of their boyfriends were never found.

The Church came to believe that Romeo's Ghost was haunting the maidens of Verona.

For decades afterwards, daughters of great men of Verona fell in love and threw themselves from that very bridge.

At last, the Pope sent his chief exorcist to imprison the boy's spirit...

in his crypt.

However, the story does not end there.

The bodies of their boyfriends were never found.

The Church came to believe that Romeo's Ghost was haunting the maidens of Verona.

For decades afterwards, daughters of great men of Verona fell in love and threw themselves from that very bridge.
What would happen if Romeo's Ghost were to escape?

The cycle of tragic love would begin again. But Romeo's Ghost could not escape without powerful outside help.

And what about Juliet? Could she return to haunt Verona?

Do you not know the teachings of the Church on this matter, my son? Juliet now resides in the home of all suicides.

To this day, that poor lovesick girl burns in Hell.
How are you feeling today, Mr. Khoklov? I'm very pleased to report that you'll soon be released.

I assure you, your cover is safe with us, Mr. Khoklov. The true identity of the Bionic Assassin will remain top secret.

I'm Francois, a team leader here at ESCS. May I offer our profuse apologies for any unpleasantness you've experienced here?

Our surgeon can re-install your bionic eye as soon as you're ready to leave.

But before you go, there are two small matters we'd like to clear up.
First, there's the question of your attitude. We can't release you without some assurance of your peaceful intentions.

Second, we would be in your debt if you would take a phone call from Mayor Ricci. He needs your help.

So what do you say?
F., sitting on bed, talking on landline phone.

A., still looking badly injured, weakly smiles.

Khoklov's alive and well!

You're sure you weren't followed?

With my eye back in my head, no one can spy on me.

Our trouble with authorities is over. Mayor has asked for our help.

Hangs up phone. Troubled look.

Calling from pay phone.

B.A. and F. in foreground, walking away from hospital.

It fits. All we have to do is find Allegra and talk Romeo back to his grave.

So Terzini released Romeo's Ghost to gain artistic inspiration?!
Easier said than done, my friend. I do not think my gun will intimidate boy who walks through stone.

I'm hoping we can reason with Romeo. His love for Allegra is sincere. And I don't think he knows he's dead.

Even if you're right, what about Terzini? Opera could just be means to villainous end.

Hmm.

All I'm saying is, we prepare for worst. Thanks to ESCS interrogators' disregard for European Human Rights Convention, they now know what we know.

ESCS agents will monitor every aspect of opera premiere.

For God's sakes, can't they just shut him down?

Whatever.

Let's attack a problem we can solve.

To find Allegra, we have to find Romeo. And I think we know where to start looking.

This is Italy, my friend. Opera is not over until gorgeous Russian diva sings.
Mayor has closed Romeo's tomb to public. It's all ours.

You're suiting up? We'll scare Romeo away before we can reason with him.

After last unpleasant experience, my philosophy is, how do you say, better safe than sorry.

In any case, ghost boy did not notice Terzini following him in lame stealth suit.
Midnight.

He certainly will not notice me.

B.A. becomes invisible in shadow.

Romeo rises from tomb.

Romeo, just the young man I'm looking for. Do I know you, sir?

I'm a friend of Allegra’s family. I'm here to bring all feuds to an end, and see true love prevail.

I do. The Riccis bear you no ill-will, Romeo. Your union has their blessing.

You speak for her family? Faint hope.
Look of indecision.

What do you ask of me?

Take me to Allegra. We'll reason together.

This will all work out, Romeo. I'll talk to Allegra and the two families.

Could you give me your parents' phone number so I can set up a meeting?

My parents... don't have a phone.

In that case, I'll just stop by. What's their address?

I... don't remember.

That's normal under the circumstances.

Night, much less crowded, no bikes. Romeo and F.'s backs to camera, faces in profile. Romeo looks confused.

Night, much less crowded, no bikes. Romeo and F.'s backs to camera, faces in profile. F.'s has cellphone in hand; Romeo looks confused.

Night, much less crowded, no bikes. Romeo and F.'s backs to camera, faces in profile.
We're here. Ciao?

It's me. I brought a friend.

Friend of the family? I never seen you before.

I'm a friend of the Firefighter. He sent me to make things right.

I had an interesting conversation with Romeo on the way over. He says his parents oppose the marriage, but he doesn't know where they live or how to contact them.
What's really interesting, though, is where I found Romeo. Where do you think your boyfriend goes during the day, Allegra?

To take care of us... I can't go out, so it's up to him to bring us the things we need.

You don't tell her that, do you, Romeo?

You can't trick me, I know he loves me.

You're right. He does. But you still need to learn the truth.

Romeo, I'd sure like to know why you sleep away your days...

in a crypt.
Sudden look of recognition.

Allegra, I hate to be the bearer of bad news...

but your boyfriend's dead.

You think I'm going to fall for this bullshit? Go fuck yourself!

Look of hysteria and denial.

Look of self-awareness intensifies.

Tell him, Romeo! Tell him!

Tell him!

Tell him!

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Wait!

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Tell him!
If my true love is **dead**, then I must *go* to him.

Romeo runs in from right.

Romeo, you've not forsaken me.

No, I'm here to save you.

Juliet, come down.
My name's not Juliet!

And I'll die before I share you with her!
Allegra jumps and starts to fall. Romeo sticks torso and one hand through stone, bracing himself with the other hand.

Rotate camera 180 degrees and pan out. Romeo, leaning down and through stone wall, catches Allegra by foot with one hand.

Allegra kicks Romeo’s hand. He loses his grip.

Let go of me!
Allegra falls out of Romeo's grasp.

Romeo watches as Allegra plummets.

Look of horror and guilt.
B.A. lands with shocked Allegra over shoulder, breaking the fourth wall. Bystanders amazed. Allegra's posterior over B.A.'s right shoulder.

Night.

Allegra, I'm taking you to your father.

You're smart girl. But you lack perspective.

B.A. puts Allegra down on her feet, but keeps one hand gripped on her arm. Romeo turns around, with look of extreme relief.
I told you I could follow unnoticed.

I believe you already.

There's more good news. Romeo's self-aware. He wants to stop driving local girls to suicide, and rest in peace.

I told him we'd help him out.

At least we know where to find him.

But honestly, fate of ghost concerns me less than fate of our friend.

Now that Ambassador is in hospital, is he going to make it?

Yes. Give him time.
Time. I just wish we had more to spare.

Mayor Ricci will see you now.


Forgive me for keeping you waiting, I had to see to my daughter.

You have my gratitude... and my ear.

Mayor Ricci, shut down this opera.

We saved Allegra. The rest of Verona may not be so lucky.

I trust you. I fear for my city. But without more proof, the show goes on.

It is in my power, however, to prepare for the worst. I'll put the police on full alert. I'll call in ESCS.

And I'll use my authority to get you something no one else can:
Front-row seats.
You kept me waiting long enough, Bertrando. It's time, Marya. I've got your finale right here. I do not think is right way to treat your lead soprano.
Verdi really did the same thing?

Submissive look.

For the last time, shut up. You're paid to sing, not to think.

This was the only way to make sure our premiere goes down in opera history.

Now start practicing. It's three hours till showtime.

Trust me. This aria is so good, by tomorrow everyone in Italy will be singing it.

You're paid to sing, not to think. Trust me. This aria is so good, by tomorrow everyone in Italy will be singing it.

For the last time, shut up. You're paid to sing, not to think.

This was the only way to make sure our premiere goes down in opera history.

Now start practicing. It's three hours till showtime.
Friends, I'm going to this opera.

You're still not strong enough.

What if all hell breaks lose?

Then we'll need his help. Isn't that right, Francois?

Oui. You know the ESCS motto: Hope for the best, prepare for...

Your platitude is known throughout the galaxy. Spare us.
Which isn't to say that we don't value your assistance.

Francois, you'll deploy your men at strategic locations throughout the Arena.

Meanwhile, the three of us will try a little judicious intimidation.

You mean...

Yes. We go to the opera, to our front-row seats...

in full costume.

Already I am liking this plan.

Now help me suit up.
Add large crowds.

For all we know, everyone here will be dead in thirty minutes.

In Russia, Maestro would be in jail already.

Yes, and we'd be in there with him, Khoklov.

I hope this opera is as good as they say. We really need to stay awake.
Signore...
Your tickets please.

First door on your left, front row center.

And here are your programs.
Dammit, there must be 50,000 people packed in here.

I told you Italy is crazy country.

Quiet, Terzini's coming to the stage.

Look!

What? I don't see anything.
Terzini... he's wearing a tux.

He dressed like a slob at the fund-raiser, remember?

Khoklov, after this is all over, remind me to kick your ass.

Agreed.

Enough - I don't want to miss the overture. And unless you spent my coma studying Italian, you'd better read the synopsis.
Act I. Prince Julian returns to Rome after routing the Magyars near Ravenna.

She offers herself to him at the victory ball.

The sight of the victorious hero makes his cousin Francesca burn with love.

Julian's refusal drives Francesca to madness.

Amore Infernale...
Composed, conducted, and directed by Bertrando Terzini

Maestro Terzini's latest and greatest creation is no mere opera. It is, as Wagner termed it, a "Gesamtkunstwerk," or "complete artwork" - an integration of music, song, drama, and stage, sprung from the mind of a single artist.
The crowd goes wild with applause.

No one's dead yet. Not even in the story. Why do Italians like this stuff so much?

Because unlike Americans, they have excellent taste.

Look, I know you're bored. Pay attention anyway.

**Act II.** At his father's request, Julian marries the daughter of the Magyar king.

But Francesca drugs Julian's bride and switches places with her on their wedding night.

When the Magyar king learns of his daughter's shame, he demands Francesca's death, but her pregnancy delays the execution.

Prince Julian's father orders him to wash his hands of Francesca. Julian refuses to see her, but sends a secret message promising to acknowledge and raise their child.
The day their son is born, Francesca carries the infant to the tower window and leaps to their deaths.

Hysterical applause.

Am liking this modern opera.

And all deaths remain fictional.

Act III. Tormented by guilt, Julian seeks entrance to Hell to save Francesca. He consults an order of nuns. The Mother Superior promises to grant Julian his request if he dies for their cause.

Julian serves the nuns for years. At last he falls in single combat with the leader of the Arian heretics. Two gates open: one to Heaven, the other to Hell.

Julian descends to Hell to find Francesca.
At last, Julian finds her, and sings his Aria of Repentance and Redemption.

Francesca changes before his eyes...

Fist clenched, she cries out to Satan for vengeance.

Satan closes the gate to Hell.

Julian is condemned to share Francesca’s fate. Her laugh echoes as the curtain falls.
Bows.

Curtain call - Terzini and Tikhon hold hands and bow in front of rest of cast.
Huge crowds of opera-goers exit the Arena. Heroes in their midst.

My God, wasn't four hours enough?

I'd like to see it again.

Crowds gradually thin out.

Well, it looks like Terzini's going to get off scot free...

...but at least Verona's safe.
Noon, the next day.

Pirated mp3s of ‘Amore Infernale’ blanket the Internet...

...the 666,666th person on earth sings ‘Amore Infernale’...

and Hell is listening.
Full body shot of Juliet, flames emanating from her body, pitchfork in hand. Her posture exactly matches statue's.
Dissipating smoke billows past statue.

Romeo...

you’ve got Hell to pay.

But first things first.

Dissipating smoke billows past statue.
It's ESCS.
There's trouble at the Arena.
Suit up.

Many opera employees fleeing the Arena.

Hold still, goddammit!

We'll take care of things out here.

We need you inside. We've got three ESCS agents in there. They've stopped responding.

First you'd better tell us what we're up against.

Eh, forget it. I read your mind.

More literally.

Too bad, let's go!

Friends, I'm afraid we should have taken Terzini's opera...

Watch yourself, Ambassador. You're still recovering.
Armor badly charred, irregular posture, smoke rising from water. Is nice and dark here. Am ready for sneak attack on crazy devil girl.

It's the ESCS agents.

They're dead.

Armor badly charred, irregular posture, smoke rising from water.
That means Terzini's the only one left alive in here.

Then it's very lucky for him...

that we're heroes.

Inside. Faint silhouette of B.A. in upper right corner, clinging to wall.
Beg for forgiveness.

And?

Juliet, I'm so sorry for trying to use Black Magic to bind you to my service.
If I were a real composer, my inspiration would have come from within. I wouldn't have needed to prey on the feelings of innocent girls.

Let me drink his blood while you burn him alive.

You lent me your imps to help with my opera. I should never have used them as my personal hitmen.

I see.

Well, what should we do with this coward?

I like the way you think. Unlike this hack, you're an artist.

Grins sadistically.

And?
Wait! You've proven your point.

Who the hell are you?

Removes helmet.

Juliet, I presume? I'm known as the Ambassador. I'm an alien lifeform here learn the ways of humanity.

I'd like to learn from you. Why are you doing this?

You'll know soon enough.
Silence won't help you. I can read your mind.

you must really want me to kill this bastard.

If that's true...

Juliet impales Terzini through back with pitchfork. Terzini shrieks with pain, raising his arms halfway.

B.A. emerges from hiding on ceiling, firing machine gun at Juliet.

Juliet flies backwards from barrage of bullets and water cannon.
Imp clawing and biting A.'s face.

Get him off me!

Close-up of imp mauling A.'s face.

B.A. in profile, facing right, shooting.

Imp prostrate. Juliet upright, raises left hand. Fire starts to come out.

Imp knocked back into wall, as Juliet in distance gets up.
Add fire and burns to mauled face.

I don't care what Romeo did, Juliet...

Ambassador!

you are one evil bitch!
Imp flies up to shield Juliet from water cannon.

My lady!

Aaaeeeiii!

Imp pancakes into ceiling and bursts into flames.

Enraged. Outstretched hand begins to flame.
Leaping left.

It's caving in!

Bye, boys.

Faux sweet smile. Pitchfork flies to her hand.

Ceiling collapses. B.A. shields A. and F. with his body as rubble and dust fill panel.

I've got a date with Romeo.
Heroes stacked on top of each other, with B.A. creating a little breathing room by holding rubble on his back.

We're... trapped.

You've got to get us out of here, Khoklov.

Not strong enough. We need... Ambassador.

He's out cold. If I try to shock him out of it, it could kill him.

If you don't try, we'll all die anyway.

I've got a dose of adrenalin in my first aid kit. Will it work on an alien?

Only one way to find out.
Juliet diagonally holding her pitchfork to Romeo's back. Romeo extremely distressed.

Women of Italy!
Media circus. Add more vans, crowds, police, fire crews in background, plus videographers pointing cameras.

I have travelled far to tell you that true love is a LIE.

I am Juliet, Verona’s most famous daughter. The coward in front of me is my former lover, Romeo.
You may think you know our story, but you're wrong.

Juliet, please...

Silence. This pitchfork can send even a ghost to Hell.

I died for Romeo. But he would he do the same for me?

No! Romeo said he loved me, but all he cared about was himself.

Like all men, he was a liar and a coward.
Look of desperation and sorrow.

Romeo took advantage of me!

He let me rot in Hell for centuries. And I'd still be there, if that hack Terzini hadn't found an old book of Black Magic.

The fool thought to bind me to his service. Little did he know that he was my ticket out of Hell.

I taught Terzini how to awaken Romeo's spirit from his tomb. I gave him the inspiration to write the lyrics to release me.
And YOU sang my aria until the gates of Hell swung open for me.

Women of Italy! Learn the true lesson of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet.

No man deserves your love. Turn your heart to stone. And if any man dares to cross you, see that he shares your pain.
Juliet diagonally holding her pitchfork to Romeo's back. Romeo frantic yet sad.

After all I've suffered, there's only one way for me to do that, isn't there?

See you in Hell, Romeo!
News van comes flying in from left.

Juliet, pitchfork still pointed toward Romeo's back, recoils. Romeo reflexively does the same. Van smashes into Juliet. Romeo disappears from sight.
Van passes right through Romeo. Juliet smacked back and to the right as van continues flying right. Van flies off camera as Juliet splats into tower.
Juliet, we're through negotiating!

Negotiations never started!

Juliet vanishes in puff of smoke.

Careful, Khoklov.
F. shoots water cannon at Juliet while B.A. machine guns her. A. ducks for cover. Juliet goes flying back toward bullseye between arches.

Juliet vanishes in puff of smoke before she hits bullseye.

Fire starts to emanate from Juliet's hands as red smoke around her clears.
Juliet recoils as B.A. leaps toward her and grabs her pitchfork. Looking smug holding her pitchfork.

B.A. snaps pitchfork over his knee as Juliet’s hands begin to flame.

Fire fizzles as F., still half on fire, hits Juliet with water cannon.
Juliet goes flying into side of building.

Juliet smashes into car below.
Switch to Verona background.

Juliet prostrate on car as fire truck sandwiches her.
Looks quizzically at pointy half of mangled pitchfork.

How do you say, "Stick fork in her because she is done"?

Close enough.

Cuff her.

Day.

Back off! She's a prisoner of ESCS.

We won't let her wake up until we figure out a way to hold her.

Wait!
I've got something to say.
Journalist scowls, raising lip in disgust.

You'd like a to make a statement, Romeo?

I would.

People of Italy, don't listen to Juliet.

I did all I could to save her - but she did not want to be saved. Juliet just wanted me to suffer with her.

I loved her. I would have done it for her. But there was another woman who loved me more.

Mama.

Big warm smile.
I'm sorry for all the other girls of Verona I've hurt.

Sorry, Carmella. Sorry, Allegra. I didn't know what I was doing.

It took a few heroes to show me the truth...

and put my guilt to rest.

Now I'm free. Farewell, Verona.

Try not to judge Juliet too harshly.
That's a wrap.

Oh, wait. Got anything to say, Ambassador?

Just this: Once again I've come to wonder whether your kind's capacity for good exceeds it capacity for evil.

I have to ask you to try harder.

OK. How about you, Bionic Assassin?

I draw different lesson.

Namely?

Is time world learned male is not always to blame for everything.

Journalist smugly grins.

Nice. Last, let's hear from the Firefighter. What do you make of all this?

Hard to say. I'm just glad Verona's still here.

Well, there is one thing. Romeo's a good kid, but I advise you in the strongest terms to ignore his plea for clemency for Juliet.

She was burning people alive!
Three days later.

The Verona Center for Adolescent Behavioral Modification

Ms. Ricci, you have some important visitors.

Really, who?

Remember me, Allegra?

Allegra dressed, looking mildly cheerful.

Sure, you're the friend of the Firefighter, right?

And I suppose you guys are friends of the Firefighter too?

Da.

Precisely.

Several mid-sized bandages on face.

I get it. "Don't ask, don't tell." Don't worry, your secret is safe with me.
What are you talking about, Allegra?

Anyway, thanks for saving me. I feel so stupid.

Don’t be too hard on yourself, Allegra. I’ve been reading a lot about the history of Romeo’s Ghost.

You kept your head longer than any girl in the past six centuries.

After all, he was Romeo.
Romeo? I barely remember him.

You know what I do remember? Being saved mid-air after I jumped off the bridge.

It was the Bionic Assassin who caught me, right?

Too bad he's so old.

Like I care.

It seems wrong.

Tell him anyway.

Fin.
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THE BESTIAL PRINCE
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Caplan is an Associate Professor of Economics at George Mason University and author of *The Myth of the Rational Voter* (Princeton University Press, 2007). His research has been profiled in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Economist, and the New Yorker. But his real dream is to publish his own graphic novel.