



# 3

## Running on XM






**H**er fingers paused over the keyboard, hovering in the air just above it. Devra thought long and hard about even using Christie's computer. She wasn't sure of the extent of ADA's reach.

She had witnessed the algorithm in action many times before, and the connectivity and speed with which ADA could collate and process data was still astonishing to Devra. And now she knew that ADA was capable of so much more. Maybe even murder, if that was her plan for Jarvis. Yet here was Devra, still alive and sitting on a sofa in one of the nicer apartments in Zagreb. ADA had something else in mind for her.

Christie, her current savior and one of the most brilliant men she had ever met, had put out pillows and blankets and had left Devra his laptop on the coffee table. There was no one







else in the apartment but the two of them. The chemical engineer was a bachelor, thankfully. Less people to lie to.

Now, as she heard him snoring in the next room, the screen of the laptop stared blankly back at her. Although she felt safe here, she also knew that the computer was an open portal – one through which ADA could reach out and find her.

It was a risk she had to take. Devra needed to start lining up her other contacts. Any communications she was about to make now would look like they came from Christie, she assured herself. And she would refrain from trying to access anything personal – her email, or online banking, or cloud storage. She was sure ADA would be waiting there if she did.



Devra's fingers hit the keyboard. She started by installing an onion router encryption service on Christie's computer. She had used this before in previous projects to ensure anonymous communications with other researchers, especially those who had emails and chats that were logged by their university IT departments.



Satisfied that her IP and information were now hidden, she set about searching for the first piece of data she'd need. The contact number for a colleague she had worked with in Milan. Then, she searched for any stories she could find about what had happened in Zurich. It now appeared to be some type of street theater that had gone awry, according to the most recent article.

Devra smiled to herself, thinking Jarvis would probably appreciate the fact that his murder was now considered a piece of performance art.

There was other information to be found about Niantic on the web. The leak within the project was an insider – of that much Devra was certain. The details were too accurate to be

suppositions. Maybe they had bigger problems than her, Devra thought. And maybe that would buy her some time.

For her plan to work, Devra was going to need to set up her own operation. That meant she needed talent, like Christie, and facilities, or access to them. And money. Always money. And if there's one thing governments of the world are great at losing but intent on keeping complete track of, it's money. Devra knew that any source of funds was going to require the utmost discretion, at least initially.

Once she had things in motion, Devra would go public, and trust that daylight would keep the NIA in the shadows. That was the plan. At least the one she had conceived over beers with Christie two hours ago.

But big picture would have to give way to small details for now. First things first. Save yourself before you save the world. She looked at the time on the computer. It read 3:49 AM. Had they been at the pub that long, Devra wondered?

Her eyes scanned Christie's living room searching for a clock. She found one sitting on a shelf in the bookcase against the wall behind her. Although it looked antique, its mechanism was battery operated. 2:23. Or maybe 2:25. The hands and dial were abstract enough to allow for a little room in either direction.

When Devra looked back at the computer, the time now appeared as 8:55 PM. The discrepancy had barely registered in her mind when a pop-up window opened in the bottom corner of the screen.

*You're up early – :)*

The message was from a woman named Katalena.

*This is not like you. I hope everything is okay.*

Devra wasn't sure what to do.

*Say something. Or type it anyway. :) I know you are there.*

Devra typed back...

*I'm good. Just a lot of work to get through.*

...hoping that whoever was on the other end of the chat didn't have a close, or even intimate, relationship with Christie. If so, then she wouldn't be able to sustain the facade for very long. Better to try and end it now, she thought.

*Can we talk tomorrow? I will call you, ok? Very busy at the moment.*

*K. Bye.*

Devra shook her head. Another detail overlooked. Why didn't she set Christie's status to offline? These little mistakes would catch up with her. Then, another message. One that Devra stared at for a long time before she closed the laptop.


*How will you call me without your phone, Devra?*

Farlowe pulled his car to a stop at the front of the Zagreb Train Station. He felt both tired and energized at the same time. Having driven for hours, he stretched as he watched people come and go from the front of the building. The sun was just starting to rise, and commuters and travelers swarmed the place.

Something had brought him here. Instinct. Senses heightened by the events of last night. That is why I punched this location into the car's GPS, he thought to himself, even though he couldn't remember doing so. Another side-effect of the XM, perhaps.

Farlowe intently watched for Devra. He knew that any moment she would appear. Every fiber of his being told him he was right until...

No. He hadn't paid close enough attention to the GPS.




He hadn't set it for the train station. What was he doing? He was certain that he had set his destination accurately. He must have. There was no one else in the car but him. He would have to learn how to control these XM blackouts, Farlowe thought.

Maybe instinct had brought him here, but the technology he couldn't remember interacting with said he should be looking somewhere else.


This was a company car, so anything punched into the GPS could be seen by Phillips. No need for an update then.

Farlowe studied the GPS screen. A green path snaked across a map of Zagreb, from his current location to Marshal Tito Square. His senses had gotten him close after all. Only a couple of turns.

He could be at the university in six minutes.



855's numerical designator gave him wide latitude and discretion once he had received the kill order on Bogdanovich and Farlowe from Phillips. Collateral damage was anticipated. Expected. There would be no paperwork or explanations required.



The two mobsters had given their lives to provide Karl with some of the tools he needed to finish his assignment once he had reached his targets. Next up was information, and Dr. Christie Novosel. Karl watched him from across the courtyard of the University of Zagreb. What happened next would decide the doctor's fate.

Devra Bogdanovich had come to Zagreb for a reason. And from the file Karl had reviewed, Christie had to be that reason. They had worked together for a couple of years on a project back in the 90's and had kept up a correspondence ever since. So far, Devra had made the right moves, but this was a very

visible mistake.

It was one that he was sure Farlowe would catch as well. Find her, find him. Simple, really. Two birds, one bullet.

Karl put on his recently obtained sunglasses, tucked the book he had earlier stolen from the library under his arm and rushed up behind the doctor, moving unnoticed through the crowd of students until he was directly behind him. He studied the man for a moment before making his move.

"Excuse me," Karl said in perfect Croatian as he grabbed Dr. Novosel by the arm.

Novosel practically jumped out of his skin, turning around flustered to see Karl behind him, looking intimidating in his sunglasses.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. I thought you had dropped this..."

Karl extended the book in his hand to the doctor.

Christie tried his best to recover, but Karl had already seen what he was looking for. Novosel was under extreme duress, and not the kind that comes from submitting papers for review or hiding an affair with a naive undergrad. The doctor had seen Bogdanovich and was at least aware of the trouble she was in.

"Uh, no... it is not mine," Novosel answered.

"My manners. Excuse me," said Karl as he took off his glasses, acting as if he realized he was being rude hiding his eyes. Novosel opened the book, looking inside the cover.

"It is from the library. I can return it."

"Don't trouble yourself. I will do it," Karl said as he took the book back.

"Are you a student here?"

"Meeting. Can you point me to the Economics building?"

"That way. Just down the path to the right. Large building

with the mossy brick.”

Christie had calmed back down, but he was sweating a little now. A delayed reaction that further confirmed what Karl suspected.

“Sorry about before,” 855 lied. He waved and quickly turned his back before Christie could respond. He was sure the doctor wouldn’t mind. In fact, he was sure Christie would be relieved to see this stranger moving away from him. It would be a shame to have to kill you, Karl thought. And that would all depend on what happened next.

Back in the rented Mercedes M-Class he picked up at his hotel, Karl circled the parking lot, looking for the stalls that were reserved for staff.

He found what he was looking for quickly. The spot was marked C. Novosel. Empty. Karl thought to himself, you might see tomorrow after all, doctor, as he took one of the burners from his pocket and texted a number.

A moment later, a single word messaged back.

*Proceed.*

He punched in the secure code ID number for Dr. Novosel from Devra Bogdanovich’s file, and then followed it with the letters “AR.”

Karl waited, spending the time checking the guns he would use. They had been kept in good condition. Oiled and blued. And, if and when they should be traced, the weapons would connect back to a gangland hit that happened in Zagreb last night.

Ten minutes later, an email arrived with the complete auto records of Dr. Novosel. 2009 Opel Astra. Silver. Plate: “GG OY 798.” And as of three hours ago, confirmed on the E70 crossing

into Slovenia.

He opened up Google Earth and checked the vehicle's last known location, then studied Devra's file again. If she was turning to old friends and lovers for help, then her trajectory was taking her toward Milan and one Dr. Gianni Basile.

Karl texted back. "Have scent."

Then he started the Mercedes and pulled away from the garage, settling in for what might turn out to be a long drive.

For a woman on the run, she sure made a lot of stops. This was the fourth one this morning, Farlowe thought to himself as he watched Devra through the windshield of his car.

She had stopped at the Škocjan Caves, just outside of Divača, Slovenia. A popular tourist stop. If Farlowe had learned anything about Devra from following her so far, it was that everything she did had a purpose.

Perhaps each of these stops had something to do with the XM that he still felt coursing through him. He was sure that it was what led him to Zagreb in the first place. It was what led him to the university. To seeing Devra with a colleague as he handed her the keys to his car. And it was helping to heighten his senses as he followed her after she got on the road.

Since he had found Devra, Farlowe had passed up hundreds of opportunities to intercept her. And he hadn't yet tried to contact Phillips. Nor had his boss tried to contact him. He had a sinking feeling of what that might mean.

From inside his car, Farlowe watched as Devra looked around. Then, she headed toward the entrance of the caves.

Farlowe hesitated, trying to figure out his next move, when the Mercedes M-Class entered the parking lot and pulled to a stop. A lone figure got of the car and moved toward the trunk,



opening it. The man unzipped a suitcase and pulled something from inside of it, slipping it into his waistband.

Damnit, Farlowe thought to himself. Someone else is here to finish the job he was assigned to do.

Farlowe was going to need more than the Glock. No going back now. He reached for the FN P90 compact defense weapon that he had retrieved from the trunk of his own vehicle during an earlier stop Devra had made. He checked that the 50-round magazine was locked. Then, he opened the car door.

855 didn't like it when things were easy. It made him uneasy. And picking up Devra's trail was almost too simple. He expected to be in the car for hours on end, but by mid-morning, he had caught sight of the Opel cruising the A2. She had been making stops, obviously. He raced past her in his Mercedes, exited, waited two minutes, then got back on the highway.

He cautiously approached again, this time looking for Farlowe. Karl spotted the company car without any trouble. The NIA purchased all of its vehicles from the same motor pool as the rest of the government. Still, he could tell that Farlowe was good. He was in the blind spot. He wouldn't be noticed by Devra. It was a solid tail.

When Devra and Farlowe pulled off the highway in Divača, Karl waited five minutes before following again. He suspected they would be going to some sort of monument, and the caves were the only logical place.

Karl pulled the Mercedes into the parking lot. He spotted the Opel and parked nearby. Then, he got out and unlocked the trunk of his car, reached into his suitcase, and made a show of grabbing the MP-443 Rook for Farlowe's benefit.

The other two guns were already safely stowed on him.



Satisfied the stage was set, Karl purchased a ticket and headed toward the caves.

Devra marveled at the interior of the Martel's Chamber, a massive natural underground cathedral. Lights near the cave walls gave the entire place an eerie, green glow. Even though she knew she should keep in motion, she also knew that she had stopped here for a reason, and now she had it. This entire formation was a huge portal. This was the kind of place she would need if she was to set up her own operation to counter what Lynton-Wolfe was creating back at Niantic.

She would need to find other spots such as this that were bursting with XM. For a moment, she had the sense of achieving some small victory.

It didn't last long as she saw a face she recognized approaching her. She had seen him before in various NIA briefings when she first joined the Niantic Project. Immediately, as it had happened to her on the train, Devra knew she was facing danger.

"You're Farlowe, right? I can explain..."

"Shut up and come with me. Now." Farlowe flashed the weapon from under his jacket. He pulled Devra around a corner.

"There is a man here who has been sent to kill us," Farlowe said to her as calmly as if he was talking about the weather.

"They tried to kill me in Zurich," Devra responded, a slight panic in her voice.

"No. That was me. This guy may be better." Farlowe tried to get a read on her. For a civilian, she was taking her current situation pretty well.

"How do I know that you won't..."





Farlowe cut her off.

“Devra, we need to get out of here, now. Leave your car. We’ll ride together from here on out.”

Suddenly, everything around Devra seemed to slow down. She realized that she was perceiving things as she had before, when she was on the train. Her mind was processing her surroundings and situation as so much data, and something beyond the NIA agent who just admitted to trying to kill her was not her primary threat.

The real danger was coming from further down the cave. In the shadows, a silhouette of a man. He was pointing at something.

Devra shoved Farlowe back as the cavern wall next to her head exploded in dust. The echo of the gunshot came a split-second later.

855 cocked his head in slight disbelief. He wasn’t in the habit of missing clean shots. Not ones like this.

However, he had no time to contemplate his error as Farlowe unloaded with the P90, sending a burst of lead back his way. Karl dived for cover, double-tapping off two quick rounds from the Rook as he hit the rocky floor of the cave.

Karl grabbed the XD from his belt and, guns in both hands, unloaded a volley of suppressing fire back toward Farlowe and Bogdanovich, who were now on the run. Rocks and dust blossomed around them as they raced toward a small underground lake.

Devra watched Farlowe fire two quick controlled bursts from the P90 as he ran just behind her. His volley of fire sent the assassin sideways into the cavern walls.

From elsewhere in the caves, Devra could hear the sounds of screams as the gunfire echoed.



“Go! Run!” Farlowe yelled at her.

Ahead, Devra could see a junction.

“Which way!?”

“Pick one!”

Devra ran as quickly as she could. She heard another quick burst from Farlowe behind her.

Karl watched his opponent in action. He was good. And he was willing to sacrifice himself for her. Interesting, Karl thought as he unloaded the rest of the XD’s and Rook’s magazines at Farlowe. Then, he backtracked down the cave passageway.

Farlowe sensed that the assassin was on the move again, and he took off after Devra. He checked the magazine on the top of the P90. Made of translucent amber plastic, it allowed him to visually see the rounds within it. Half a magazine left. And he still had the Glock if necessary. Which it probably would be.

Two passages. For reasons he couldn’t understand, like momentarily losing his sense of time back in Zurich, or knowing how to find Devra in Zagreb, Farlowe’s gut told him to go left. He quickly rounded the corner, and rushed forward.

Running with every ounce of strength he could muster, Farlowe tried to catch up to Devra. She was just ahead of him, and he could see Devra bathed in light near a shallow underground pool. Was it stagecraft for the tourist, or something else? Farlowe couldn’t be sure, but if it was XM, then Devra was fully immersed in it.

That’s when it hit him. Actually, two things, almost simultaneously.

The first was the XM, which as before, momentarily stunned him. The second was the 9mm Parabellum round from

Karl's GSh-18 traveling at 1,300 feet per second and tearing into him with the energy of sledgehammer – the impact sending him crashing back into the cavern wall. The P90 fell from his hands and skittered down the cavern floor, sliding to a stop about ten feet away.

Immediately, Farlowe could feel the fire coming over him as he looked down at the gaping hole in his side. He looked up at Devra, who was staring back at him in complete shock. She could see that his wound was fatal.

Devra's thoughts exploded inside her head. How had it come to this? How had their research... her research, led to death and destruction? Was this what the future held for the world now that XM would be part of its reality?

"Don't let this be for nothing... go. Run!"

Devra paused only for a moment, then ran with all her might, away from the dying man. With each step she was determined that this was a destiny she would stop. No matter the cost. Even her own life, if that was what it would take.

She heard the screams of tourists in the distance, all making a beeline for the exit, and she turned toward the sound, hoping it would lead her to freedom. Instead, it led her to something else.

"There's nothing for you there, doctor. Time you stop running."

Karl stepped from the shadows directly in front her, his gun pointed squarely at her chest.

"If it is any comfort, you have done much better than most amateurs given a similar set of circumstances."

"Please. I don't know why this is happening..." Devra wanted to cry, but instead squared herself.

"Me neither. But it is. Now step back down the passage.

Back toward our fast-fading friend, please.”

Karl emphasized the direction with the muzzle of his weapon. Devra turned and raised her hands. “That won’t be necessary, doctor. But do pick up the pace, if you would.”

As they approached Farlowe, Devra could see him look up at her. He was utterly broken, lying in a pool of his own fluids. She could see he was dying. Now, his face also let her know that soon, she would join him as a bloody mess. And there wasn’t a damn thing he could do about it.

“Sidearm,” Karl said.

“Just get it over with.” Farlowe practically spit the words from his mouth.

Karl now had his weapon trained on Farlowe.

“Sidearm, please. We all have a part to play here, Agent Farlowe. Doctor, if you would stand about six feet away, and over there.”

“I can’t reach it. Right shoulder,” Farlowe said.

Devra did as she was told, a questioning look on her face. Farlowe saw her expression, and called to her.

“You’re going to kill me. And I’m going to kill you.”

“Don’t ruin it,” Karl said. He reached down and helped Farlowe into a seated position. As he did so, he felt under Farlowe’s jacket and pulled the Glock from his shoulder holster.

Even though Karl’s back was to her, Devra had the sense that any wrong move would be her last. And that standing still would only prolong what was to come, even as each second became more precious than the last.

Farlowe could feel his breath returning. Shock was doing its job, but blood was pouring from his side at an alarming rate.

“How long have you been in?” Farlowe asked his killer.



"Fourteen years," Karl answered.

"Me? Too long," Farlowe sputtered.

"I haven't gotten there yet."

"You will," Farlowe replied, managing to smile. "We all know one day, they're going to take out the trash and we're going to be in it."

"Yeah," Karl knelt beside Farlowe and put the Glock into his hand while controlling it with his own.

"I don't have anything to confess."

"Okay," Karl said.

"But I've been having these... these moments. Where I lose track of time. Like I'm not there. But then I am. And I'm content."

Farlowe looked at the blood pooling all around him.

"Do you think it's like that?" Farlowe asked Karl.

"Sure. Could be."

"Please. No... please," Devra pleaded.

"Shhh, now... you won't feel anything. I've done this many times before," Karl said.

Devra realized this was it. Her mind raced for something... anything.

"You're not wearing gloves. Your fingerprints will be all over the gun..."

Karl turned back to Farlowe. "Tell her," he said.

"You watch too much television," Farlowe told Devra in a calm voice. She realized that he had already given up. He had made peace with the fact he was going to die. But she wasn't ready to quit. Not yet. Not after all she had been through.

His hand wrapped around Farlowe's, Karl had the dying man raise his Glock toward Devra.

"You can't kill me!" Devra cried out.



“Well, doc, you couldn’t be more wrong if you tri—”

The burner in Karl’s pocket began to chime, the sound echoing off the walls of the chamber.

Devra and Farlowe both looked at the assassin as the chime seemed to get louder.

“You gonna answer that?” Farlowe asked.

Karl realized that Phillips would not call the number unless it was urgent. Although every instinct told him to squeeze the trigger of the Glock in Farlowe’s hand, then answer, instead he pulled the phone from his pocket and looked at the text message on the screen. He studied it as Devra studied him.

Then, Karl pointed the muzzle of the gun straight down at the ground and pulled the trigger repeatedly, a steady staccato of gunfire that almost left Devra unable to hear. Karl fired until the first metallic click and suddenly stopped. Empty.

“Silver Mercedes. M-Class. Go easy, it’s a rental.”

Karl tossed the Glock to the side as Devra stared at him and Farlowe with a combination of confusion and relief.

“Turns out you were right, doc. Excuse me.”

Devra watched in disbelief as Karl calmly turned and walked away from her. She struggled to compose herself, straining to keep an eye on him as he disappeared back into the shadows.

“I’ll get a doctor,” Devra finally said to Farlowe when it was clear the killer was gone.

“No. You’ll get as far away from here as possible. And you’ll do it now. Whatever just happened... never happens. So don’t waste it on a dead man.”

Devra didn’t move.

“I’m going to close my eyes, now,” Farlowe said as he leaned back into the wall. Devra knew that was her cue. There



would be no goodbye.

When Devra exited the caves, the police had the entire parking lot surrounded. She walked through the crowd of panicked tourists and workers, numb to everything around her. Christie's Opel was missing. There was some shattered glass where she had left it parked.




Nearby, she could see a Mercedes. A silver one. The trunk was open. Devra moved toward it the car, and looked into the open trunk. Nothing. She shut the trunk and moved to the driver's side door. She was sure it would be unlocked. She pulled the handle and the door popped open. The key fob lay on the driver's seat, waiting for her.

Devra climbed behind the wheel of the Mercedes. She sat for a long moment, lost in her thoughts. The moment was broken by a police officer who banged on the hood of the car. He pointed for her to leave. Now.

Devra started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot. If she hurried, she could make Rome by nightfall.

Farlowe had seen enough and caused enough GSW's to know that his was fatal. A gunshot through the lower extremities damaged organs and tissues and not only caused an excessive amount of internal bleeding, but also contaminated the body with the contents of the stomach and the intestines. The assassin knew his business. He could have finished him outright, but Farlowe realized that his killer wanted him alive long enough to set up the scene he had planned. One that had included Devra and Farlowe killing each other.

Phillips, the bastard, Farlowe thought. Not only had he authorized this, but he wanted to smear my reputation at the



agency by making it look like a rabbit had gotten the best of me.

Well, Farlowe reflected, the rabbit is still on the run.

He opened his eyes.

How long had it been? Had he blacked out again? Given his current situation, completely forgivable, Farlowe told himself.

What was taking them so long?

He knew that the local authorities would be coming soon. And he hoped he'd be dead before they tried to save him and prolong the inevitable.

So Farlowe waited for death. And waited.

And waited.

