

Introduction

I could tell you my name, but that is classified information. I could tell you my age, my height, my favorite color. But guess what? That's all classified too. Everything I'm about to tell you is top secret and you can't tell anyone. Got it? Good.

So you can better understand this story, let's give me a name. How about Jade? Yes, Jade will work. I'll change everyone else's names too. My twin brother Max, and younger brother and sister Ben and Kate all live at an academy for young and talented secret agents. The academy's name is also top secret, but for our purposes, let's call it Brookhurst Academy. We train here to become real secret agents when we're old enough. We have technology here that no one has ever seen before, technology that keeps us hidden from the rest of the world. Sometimes, we even help out on missions with Brookhurst's adult agents, such as our parents. That's why we have a mission team, a team of the twelve most gifted of all of the students here. Ever since I was first sent here, I have always dreamed of working on the mission team and my brother Max is lucky enough to be on it. Each member of the mission team has a special number to be called by (Max's is 86) and specializes in a specific area of work, such as safe-cracking, forging, assassination, etc. When the twelve of them work together, there's no stopping them.

So what do we do with the rest of our time? We study mostly, and train. And what better way to train than with specially designed sports that are only possible for agile, flexible, and strong spies-in-training? I compete against other secret agency schools in the sport of Dance-Fighting. Dance-Fighting combines dance, martial arts, gymnastics, and a little bit of cheerleading. And Dance-Fighting practice is where I am right now.

Chapter 1

The purple belt team is one of the highest. We train every day for four to six hours. Now, as we run through our routine, I can feel the sensation of flying, if only for a second. I curl my body into a tight ball to complete the triple backflip, then lay out, stiff as a board but light as a feather so my teammates can catch me. Since I am the smallest girl on the team, I fly most of the lifts. I silently plead for coach to let us keep going, since we always stop here. Luckily, she lets us go to the next part of the routine.

When I safely come down from the arms that hold me, I grab the long wooden staff. That's where the martial arts aspect comes in. We use props, such as these staffs, in our routines. Sometimes we use swords or nunchucks, but we mostly stick to the wooden staffs because they're the least dangerous and the easiest to choreograph around. I run to the other side of the mat and crouch down on the floor with the staff above my head. Makena runs up behind me, grabs the staff, completes a front walkover over my head, and lands in front of me, staff in hands. Abruptly, the music stops. I stand up, back aching slightly from holding that tight position.

“No, girls, you’re doing it wrong!” Coach Tory yells, “Back up and take it from right after the lift. Alaina Rose and Emma, if you mess up one more time, you’ll have one hundred push-ups!”

I love Coach Tory, but she can be a little tough sometimes. However, she is the reason we almost always win at the World Championships. So no one complains when we run the same sections over again.

Our routine tells the story of sailors lost at sea who are found by mermaids. I, being one of the sailors, get a lot of action and I am the last one on the giant mat that acts as a stage after everyone else leaves. I also get to fly one of the most breathtaking lifts in the routine. I start on the ground and lift my right leg to take a step forward. Two of my teammates grab my foot and another two steady my back. I lift my left foot and another two teammates come in to grab that one. This continues and I step higher and higher to the top. Emma throws a staff to me and I catch it, place it on the ground. The teammates holding my back come around to hold the staff steady for my descent. I slide down the staff and when my feet feel the hard cushion below, I grab the staff and run to the back of the mat.

So begins a tumbling pass by the “mermaids” and as each girl finishes her back handspring, she runs to the side of the big blue mat. The rest of the “sailors” run away leaving only me. I fall to the ground as the music ends.

“That was better,” says Coach Tory, “Jade, you’re going to need to act a little more in the end.”

Then, she calls us all to a quick stand-up meeting in the center of the mat.

“As you all know, East Zones is coming up in a few weeks. We need to take top three here to move on to Nationals. If we can beat all of the academies in the West Zone at Nationals, then we’ll move on to Worlds. And at Worlds, we’ll need to defend our title. Most of the purple belts moved up to red, so you will need to prove your spot on this team. Also, we have one quartet, two trios, five duets, and seven solos competing. If you are in any of these routines, school hour practices start tomorrow. Everyone understand?”

“Yes,” we all answer.

“Okay then. You guys can go.”

On the way back to the dormitory I share with my brothers and sister, I stop off at the cafeteria for a quick smoothie. It is sweet and heavenly in my mouth. I check the time. 5:00. Just in time for the cable car that can take me to my dorm.

I hop off the cable car and haul my practice bag and backpack on my shoulders. At the door, I place my hand on the recognition pad.

“Welcome Jade Lockhart,” the speaker on the wall tells me, “You may enter. Check your data pad. There is a message from Headquarters for you.”

The door pops open and I take the stairs to my room two at a time, excited by the news. Headquarters rarely sends direct messages to anyone. Why would they send one to me? Am I in trouble?

I yell a quick “Hello!” to Max, who is downstairs reading. Once I change into my pajamas, I plop down on my bed and pull out my data pad. I open the message from H.Q., scared and excited at the same time.

“You, Jade Lockhart, have been selected to try out for a spot on the mission team. As you well know, former agent 27 has met a tragic and untimely end and eleven members of the team remain. You are to report to the mission team training center in two weeks’ time for an assessment of your skills. We’ll see you then and good luck.”

I feel like I am about to explode with happiness. Now is my chance to prove myself, to live my dream! I rush downstairs to tell Max the good news.

“Max, Max! I can try out for the team! I can really try out!”

Max gives me a funny look.

“What team?” he asks.

“The mission team! Now what skills should I show them? I can do some gymnastic skills, but I don’t really have good aim when it comes to shooting a gun...”

He interrupts me.

“Wait, slow down. You got a message from H.Q.?”

“Yes! Will you help me train?”

“There are rules against training other people to get on the team. But no one needs to know. Well, I’m very proud of you. Now get something to eat and go to bed; you’ll need to work extra hard these next two weeks.”

At night I am too excited to sleep. I call my best friends, Eden, Brianna, and Samantha on my data pad to tell them too.

“Really?” Brianna asks, “That is such an honor! I’m so proud of you!”

“Yeah,” says Eden, “you are really lucky. If anyone deserves to be on the team, it’s you.”

“I was asked too,” mumbles Samantha.

“Are you gonna try?” I ask.

“Nah. Too much of a commitment. When I’m old enough, I want to work in the lab. Not in the field. I value life too much.”

“Anyway, we should study for that test in Spy History tomorrow. Hey, do you guys know who invented the Press n’ Leap Technique? I am still really lost on that one. Dumb technique anyway. We don’t have to show it for the test, do we?” This from Eden.

“Yeah we do. And it was Agent J. Nights of E.U.C.L.I.D. Agency America,” I yawn, “I’m gonna go to sleep now. It’s getting late.”

“Good night!” They all say and then sign off.

It takes all my effort to put my data pad on its charger and haul myself into bed.

Chapter 2

“Jade, wake up!” Max is shaking me.

“Big day today! You have tryouts!”

With those words, I spring up out of bed. Max leaves me alone to get dressed. I put on my sleek black long-sleeved shirt and some comfy black leggings. I then put on my black knee-high boots, the ones I got from my parents for my birthday. The soft ones that are light and comfy but sturdy and strong at the same time, with secret compartments in them to hide small gadgets and weapons. The ones that were made to perfectly fit only me. I tie my red-ish hair back into a ponytail and examine myself for a few minutes in the mirror before heading downstairs to breakfast.

Max, who is wearing his all-black mission team uniform, and I hop on the cable car that runs down to the mission team training center. I am giddy with excitement on the inside, but calm and composed on the outside. When we arrive, Max goes in through the back door since he and the rest of the team will be judging me. I enter through the front to find a small white waiting room. Another girl, dressed all in black, is sitting in one of the chairs, reading something on her data pad. I walk up to the registration desk and place my hand on the pad.

"Welcome, Jade Lockhart. Sit down and wait for now. You will be called in when the judges are ready to see you."

I do as the voice from the desk tells me to and sit next to the girl.

"Are you here for the assessment too?" I wonder aloud.

She just nods her head unenthusiastically.

"You know my brother is on the team," I say, trying to be friendly to calm my nerves.

"That's nice."

"Are we the only ones trying out today?"

"God, I hope so."

"Great! That means that we have a better chance of getting picked. See, with just two of us, we each have a fifty percent chance of making it on the team. If there were, say, twenty of us, then we'd each have a five percent chance."

"You know what?" the girl says, still not looking at me, "I'm not your friend, okay, I'm just here to win that spot so I can get away from the rest of your horrid cheeriness."

Then, she gets called in.

"May the best spy win!" I call out to her as she stalks away towards the now-open door next to the registration desk.

About thirty minutes later, I am called in. The girl isn't there anymore. The room is all black, and the mission team and two other men are sitting behind a black desk with papers in front of them. They all look like they're trying to hide a grin behind a somber expression.

"Ms. Lockhart, I am Agent Knolls, the mission team director. Are you ready to begin your skills assessment?"

"Yes, of course," I say, willing my body not to shake with nervous excitement.

"Okay. Show us what you got."

A wall lights up, showing rows and rows of swords, daggers, pistols, staffs, any weapon you could possibly dream up. I grab a staff off the wall, feel it in my hand, throw it up and catch it a few times, put it back on the wall. I do this with the first five staffs I

see until I find the perfect one. Agent Knolls clears his throat loudly. I start to twirl the staff in my hands, just like my warm-up for Dance-Fighting. I go on to the gymnastic moves, do a standing back tuck and a few handsprings. I never miss a beat. My confidence rises, and I start to do some of the harder stuff using that staff, owning it. I finish with a front aerial and land in splits, staff over my head.

Max claps loudly, but stops when he realizes no one else is doing the same.

"That was quite a show," says Agent Knolls, sounding unimpressed, "but is there anything else you can do? Like with a knife or a gun, or a bow and arrows?"

"I can use swords and nunchucks."

"But can you shoot at a target and hit it?"

"I think so."

Good thing I had Max to help me. I take a dagger off the wall, step back, and breathe for a few seconds before hurling the dagger at the target on the far wall. I miss the center of the target by about two inches. I can feel my shoulders sag, but luckily everyone is taking notes on their papers.

"Wanna try again?" Agent Knolls asks me.

I try three more times, all to the same avail.

"Okay Ms. Lockhart. Now for the second part of the test. The simulation. Please follow Agent 44 to the simulation room."

A tall, handsome boy stands up from his chair and leads me to a door concealed behind the target. He leads me briskly down a long hallway and I have to run to keep up. He stops abruptly at a big black door and forces his hand on the recognition pad. I hear the click of the lock on the door and he and I step inside.

This room is identical to the room I was just in, weapon wall and everything. Agent 44 walks to a wall and opens up a panel. He starts typing something in.

"Okay. You have one hour to stop the bad guys. They've planted a bomb near you and you need to find it and disable it."

He hands me an earpiece.

"If you need any help, press this button on the side and talk to me. Wear this at all times. Go take your pick of weapons."

I pick the same staff I used before but a different dagger. I also load up the pockets in my boots with ammo and strap a gun to the utility belt 44 hands me.

"You ready?" he asks me

"Ready as I'll ever be," say, not ready at all.

44 flips a switch on the wall and the lights in the room fade to black. When they turn on again I am in a whole new world. It looks to be an alleyway or something, and it's darkly lit. I scan the alley and look for the best way to get out. I see a ladder on the side of what looks to be some kind of apartment building and decide that the best way to go is up. I sling the staff's strap over my shoulder and begin to climb.

Once I reach the top of the building, I look out for a way inside.

"Is the bomb inside this building?" I ask 44.

"Yes," he replies.

I look down to the alley I left to see four men with dark trench coats, dark hats, dark glasses, and guns advancing on the spot I was just in. Huh. This is a simulation, so I

bet whatever the men really are is programmed to do exactly the same thing every time. Interesting. Now I decide to think like the people who made this test. What would they want me to do? They would want me to stay and fight the men, so I do just the opposite by staying in my spot. Then what? They would want me to enter the building to the front. So I find the door to the roof and use it to get to the top floor.

"Is the bomb on the top floor?"

"No."

They people who made this test would want me to take the stairs, because the stairs would be a less conspicuous option. So I take the elevator down to the lobby. I hide behind a desk in the lobby and wait for the creepy men I assume are coming to show up. My suspicions are correct and the men show up on time. I ambush them, and "kill" all but one. I then let the one take the elevator up. I take out the wristwatch I'd been hiding in my boots and start timing. It takes about thirty seconds for an elevator to reach one floor, and it stops there for about thirty seconds. I walk to the elevator and call for it to come down. When the door opens, I see how many minutes have passed. Four. I estimate that the mysterious man is on the forth floor and take the elevator up.

I step out on the forth floor to see a door being slammed. I quietly tiptoe to that door and try the handle. It's locked. Good thing one of my classes is Honors Lock Picking! I take a pin from my hair, straighten it out, and insert it into the lock. After a few minutes of picking, I give up because it's too loud. The man must know I'm here.

So, I take out my gun and just shoot the lock. I learned this tactic in class and it doesn't always work, so I'm surprised when it the door creaks open. Sure enough, the man is in the room and he turns around. I lift the staff off my back and slam it into the door to close it, leaving only the door between me and the what-I-assume-to-be-a-dummy man.

The man will fire bullet after bullet at the door until he is out of ammunition. As the bullets puncture and fly past the door, I hold my staff out in the path of an incoming one. Sure enough, the bullet passes right through the staff and I deem it safe to have a little fun with my observers. I stand in the path of the bullets as they go through the door with my arms outstretched. They all pass right through me as they did the staff.

When the rain of bullets stops, I yank my staff away from the door and it opens once again. I enter the room this time and prepare to fight the man. Using my staff, I manage to knock the man "unconscious" and drag him to the window to throw him out. Were this a real mission, I would probably be less reckless, but come on, I can have some fun with a simulation. The man is lighter than a real human, which is what I expected. And why I throw him out the window with such ease.

Next task: find the bomb. Let's see. If I lived in this apartment, where would I hide a bomb?

Across from where I'm standing at the window is the door I entered through. To my right are a couch, a desk, and a door to what I assume to be a kitchen. To my left is a TV and a door to what I assume is the bedroom. After searching the desk, I go through the door to the kitchen. I search drawer after drawer and cabinet after cabinet. Nothing. I proceed to the bedroom and rifle through every drawer and closet. Once I'm sure I've covered the house, I wander back to the TV room, frustrated.

How much more time do I have? I'm about to panic, give up on this room, search the rest of the rooms with the rest of the time. As I shuffle to the door, I step on a creaky floorboard. I turn around; press my foot on that same board again. A good spy never gives up and investigates everything she has to work with.

I jam my stick under the board to pry it up. Sure enough, a small bomb is hidden inside. I am able to hear the telltale ticking now. Why couldn't I hear it before? What idiot decided to put a bomb there? It's like they wanted me to find it. Oh well. I guess they're just testing whether I can dismantle it or not. I never really learned that too well. That should be one of the first things we learn! But on the other hand, the teachers probably didn't want the younger kids anywhere near a bomb. That I understand.

I remember watching TV once and there being mention of being able to disable a bomb by putting in water. I head over to the kitchen, careful not to disturb the bomb. I find a large container in a cabinet and fill it with water from the sink. When the container is full, I carefully submerge the bomb. The ticking stops and I release my hold on the bomb. The lights fade to black just as they did when I started the test.

Now, I am back in the room with the wall of weapons. 44 closes the wall panel.

"Okay. You're done. Put your weapons back and follow me back to the waiting room. We will debate some, then tell you the results."

I'm filled with relief at being done. Once I'm back in the waiting room, I plop into a chair and take the first deep breath in several days. The girl who was mean to me earlier is also here, looking cross as ever.

I wait for fifteen minutes before she gets called in again. Another five until she comes back. When she does, a giant smirk is spread across her face. She strolls to the door, then turns around and waves happily to me.

Did she get on the team? She did, didn't she. Then why am I still here? The speaker near the desk tells me to enter the room again. The mission team is still there, along with Agent Knolls and the other man.

"Ms. Lockhart, unfortunately you have not made the team. You will be escorted down the hall again to have your memory of this process wiped. We can't have you telling other people what goes on in this facility or what the tests are like. Agent 44?"

As 44 rises from his seat, tears well up in my eyes. He grabs my arm and I give little resistance. Everyone in here is trained to kill, and I can't even pass their dumb tests.

We walk down the long hallway again, this time stopping at a door to the left. He places his hand on the recognition pad and the door opens.

"Why didn't I pass?" I ask, ashamed and scared.

"The skills test was fine. It was just the simulation. We had a checklist and everyone had to mark when you completed each part of the situation. You did not complete most of the parts, so your overall score was lower than Serafina's. Then we took a vote and she won. I'm sorry."

He did not sound very sorry. He points to a chair and I'm guessing he wants me to sit in it. So I stay standing up. I'm determined to resist everything. I can't go down without a fight.

"Sit down. There," he demands.

I continue to resist. 44 shakes his head and turns around to tap some things into a screen on a desk. I take his facing away from me as an opportunity and look around for something heavy within reach. Nothing. I unleash my anger at the mission team by running at 44 and attempting to throw a punch at his neck. But he turns around just in time to clench my fist in his hand. I kick his leg and he lets me go in surprise and I throw another punch, this time aimed at his jaw. He grabs my arm and twists it backwards in a way it should not go.

I kick him again, this time in the stomach, and he lets go again. I sprint for the door and try to open it. It's locked. And then, the lights go out. Leaving 44 and me alone in pitch-black darkness.

Chapter 3

I hear screams and shuffling from other rooms. I can't see anything, but I know the doorknob is sweaty in my hands. 44 comes up behind me and tackles me to the ground. He puts his hand over my mouth.

"Shhhh..." he whispers.

I do as I am told and stay quiet. In about fifteen minutes, the lights come back on again and the door unlocks.

"What happened? Is this one of your dumb tricks?" I ask, blinking in the brightness of the light.

"Wait here. I'll be right back."

I follow 44, even though he told me not to. He just sighs. We walk to the room the mission team was in. The door is unlocked, so we enter. There is nothing inside, no weapons, no Agent Knolls, no mission team. But all of this is hard to make out because of all the haze in the room. Sleeping gas, no doubt.

44 slams the door shut. He takes a miniature data pad from his black utility belt and types something in. He then holds it to his ear. Nothing happens. He swears, and then puts it back.

"Come on!" he says, then walks quickly through the door to the waiting room.

Suddenly, the lights go out again and an image of a man appears on the wall.

"Hello students of Brookhurst Academy! Delighted to make your acquaintance. I'm Jack Brown, principle of Chaos Academy for the Enrichment of Evil Tendencies. I partnered with the Chaos Association to make this wonderful heist possible. You see kids, once upon a time, a Chaos scientist designed a weapon that could suck up all the water in the oceans and use it to flood all of the organizations for good. He died soon after, but not before ripping the blueprints in half. One half of the plans are here, at your pitiful school, and we have the other half. So, we took your teachers, your mission team, and your adult agents. And, to save us work, you have forty-eight hours to find your half and give it to us. Doesn't that sound nice? Oh! I almost forgot. If you try to stop us...you can't. See you soon!"

I guess this was broadcast all over the school, because I see the looks on the faces of other kids outside.

"What do we do?" I ask 44 as I follow him outside.

He lets out a string of curses.

"There's nothing we can do. I've faced Chaos before and they're good. I mean very good. There's no way I can face them alone."

"You'll have me."

"You can't even pass the simulation. That should be the easy one! And you only have one skill."

"Maybe, but I didn't pass the test because I thought outside the box. I didn't do what you wanted me to. Didn't fall into your traps."

"Yeah, but you also proved you can't fight others."

"Fine. I'll do it myself."

"Do what?"

"I don't know. Save our school."

I begin to walk toward the cable car stop while 44 just stands there.

"Wait!"

I turn around as 44 runs toward me.

"I'll help you. It's better than sitting around doing nothing while you're either out there dead or getting all the glory. Plus, you're nothing without me."

I glare at him.

"Where are we going?" he asks.

"To the Dance-Fighting studio. I need some stuff."

When we arrive, the studio is empty. I head for Studio A, where I normally practice, to grab a staff for myself. 44 tells me we can find guns and ammo in the storage shelter back at the mission team training center and that a map of all the spy academies can be found at the Brookhurst Secret Services Inc. Museum in Downtown Brookhurst. So we head back to the training center first.

The storage shelter has an identical weapon wall to the ones in the first and second rooms I was in for the assessment, plus interesting new gadgets and gizmos I had never seen before. I grab a small handgun and extra bullets to stuff in my boot pocket. I want to keep it light so I can function well, so I add a watch that can do exactly what the data pad can do, plus more. 44 grabs similar items, and then we head to the museum.

When we get to the museum, we find it easy to get in. 44 uses his data watch to locate the map, which we find easily as well. I assume Chaos used whatever tech they had to shut down all of our lasers and defenses. Sure enough, the map is in plain sight, with no barriers for us to get through. 44 takes it and scans it with his watch. The watch downloads all the information and now, it can act as a GPS for us. These gadgets are so handy!

"Okay. Now we have to form a plan," says 44, "should we find the blueprints ourselves or rescue the mission team and teachers?"

"Both! I say."

At this point, 44 knows there can be no arguing with me.

"Alright, fine. Agent Knolls is the only one who knows and has access to the blueprints."

"You knew about this?"

"Of course. I've known about this since the Chaos scientist gave the plans to Knolls. He was truly evil, planting the seeds of war by giving each side what the other one wanted. With this weapon, each side could overthrow the other. We've had spies at Chaos giving us information, but even they didn't know this was going to happen."

"Why didn't the scientist give the plans to the Chief instead?"

"The Chief isn't in charge of the kids. Wouldn't it be more evil for kids to be eradicated than adults?"

"So you're saying that we have to rescue Knolls and the team first?"

"That's what I was getting at. But it won't be that easy. To get out of here, we have to get past the Chaos agents that are no doubt guarding the Brookhurst border. Then we have to go out in public to get to the Academy and once we get there, we have to get in."

"Okay, so how do we get out of here?"

"We convince the agents on the border that we're running away because we're scared."

"How do we do that?"

"Chaos agents may be trained killers, but they're not very smart. We just have to act very scared. They probably won't care about us and let us pass. After all, even if we were trying to infiltrate Chaos Academy, what good can two teenagers do?"

Chapter 4

44 and I go to our dorms to pack up for the trip. I get a backpack and fill it with food, clothes, a canteen of water, duct tape, rope, and various sharp objects. I keep my boots on, but change the rest of my outfit to look like a random student and not a girl on a mission. Once I finish, I head down to the mission team training center to meet 44. He is there already. We take the cable car down to the edge of the school. We have to walk to the boarder from there, but it isn't far.

The boarder is packed with big, beefy men wearing black. 44 and I splash some water on our faces to make it look like we're crying, then run towards the line of men. Normally, there would be a wall of lasers to get past and an electric fence, but not now after the Chaos agents turned our power off.

"What do you think you're doing?" one man asks in an almost cliché low voice.

"We're running away sir," I stammer, trying to make myself look terrified, "my brother and I. We don't want to be here when Chaos takes over. It's too scary!"

"What would the evil thing to do be boys?" asks another man.

"Uh, we could make them stay here?"

"We could torture them?"

"You could let us go and make us face the dangers of living in an unprotected society with nothing to survive on and die a slow and painful death," 44 says, thinking fast.

They all mumble for a while, nodding their heads in approval.
“Okay, you are free to die as you please!”
The men step aside to let us through. We thank them and run until we are out of earshot.
“Oscar-winning performance,” 44 says to me.
“Thank you sir,” I say, laughing as I wipe the water from my face, “Now what do we do?”
44 pulls up the map on his watch.
“It says here we’re in a subway in Washington D.C.”
Sure enough, a train passes us.
“I’ve never been outside the school before,” I say, looking around in wonder at the subway station.
“Yeah, well, here it is. Isn’t it a wonder,” says 44, sarcastically.
We get on the train that takes us near the International Spy Museum. Wow. It’s that easy to get into Chaos Academy. Alright, whatever works.

Except now I’m finding out that it’s not that easy. Because instead of the map leading us to the actual museum, it leads us around the corner to a door in the subway station.
“You’re sure this is a *secret* entrance?” I whisper.
44 doesn’t answer, but he’s probably thinking the same thing. We keep following the trail, through the door, up a stairwell, through another door, down a long hallway, down some stairs, around a corner, through a third door, and finally into an elevator. We take the elevator up and when the doors open, we are in a room that is painted all black. There is one door, painted red, on the wall to the right, but nothing else in the room.
“What can we do now?” 44 wonders aloud.
“We can create a diversion. Most of their adult agents are at Brookhurst or on missions. That leaves the kids and the teachers. If we can get to the main power building, we can turn off all of their power like they did to us. They’ll scurry to fix it while we free the teachers and the team.”
44 nods. He’s not willing to admit my victory.
“Are you okay with tight spaces?” he asks, not sounding concerned at all.
“What?” I inquire.
Then, I follow his gaze upwards.

Chapter 5

Crawling through ducts is not as easy as I expected it to be. It’s more like sliding, since crawling makes so much noise. Inside the duct it’s hot and sticky and small and smelly. Who would ever want to work for Chaos? They don’t really teach us much in the way of physically doing stuff at school, but I have crawled through ducts before. Once. When 44’s watch tells us we’re in the main power building, we stop. Check to see if anyone is in the room.

There is one kid in the room, guarding the screen that has all the power switches. 44 removes the grate and I drop down through the small square. The kid points a gun at me, but I knock his feet out from under him with my staff. As he falls, the gun slips out of his hands and slides toward me. I pick it up and stow it away.

44 drops out and rushes over to the power switches. I move to follow him, but the boy gets back up and throws a punch at me. I take it, but use my staff and skills to battle him. Finally, I get a blow to the clavicle in and then use my staff to hit him in the head, knocking him unconscious.

“Done!” proclaims 44.

“How did you do that?” I question him.

“I’m a hacker. That’s my special ability.”

“Oh.”

Suddenly, everything goes black.

When I wake up, 44 and I are chained to chairs in the middle of a grey, concrete-like room. He is still unconscious. Where are we? When 44 wakes up, he looks just as confused as I feel. A girl’s lilting voice comes through a speaker on the wall.

“Did you really think you could get in without anybody noticing? Now I really know how dumb Brookhurst agents are. I mean I worked there once, but only with the team...”

The girl who belongs to the voice enters the room.

“The girl from the mission team assessment!” I gasp, bewildered.

“Yes!” she announces, “Serafina Jensen. Lovely character, I must admit. But sadly, she was just that.”

The girl rips off her mask and her brunette wig to reveal blonde hair and a beautiful heart-shaped face with piercing blue eyes and red red (probably highlighted with lipstick) lips. 44 gasps.

“Madison?”

“Who’s Madison?” I wonder.

“Madison James, pleased to meet you,” she shakes my hand, “or as I was more commonly known, Agent 27.”

“I watched you die!” shouts 44, disbelieving.

“For her purposes, let’s start from the beginning.”

Madison sits down in a velvet chair provided by the two bodyguards that flank her. I decide that her story would be the perfect cover for me to try to find a way to get out of the chains that bind me. She is looking directly at 44, after all.

“I was sent to Brookhurst Academy as a young child by my parents, who you probably know by now to be double agents. I trained there, became better than everyone else, blah blah blah, was practically *begged* to join the mission team. But when we went on the mission to Chaos’s European Headquarters, you, Evan, asked me out and I said yes. I was so distracted on that mission that I fell right into the hands of Chaos. They kept me alive, since I speak six languages and one of them is French, and they agreed to let me join them if I faked my own death. So I did. And now I’m Chaos’s top agent instead of Brookhurst’s, which I think is an improvement.”

Then she struts over to 44 and kisses him on the lips. For a very long time. I feel a twinge of jealousy, just a little one. When she pulls away, she sits back in her chair and her bodyguards pick up girl and chair and carry them out of the room.

At this point, I think it's safe to free my arms. I pick the lock on the chains around my legs, then hand the hairpin to 44 so he can pick his as well. When he's done, I throw him a bottle of poison lip balm.

"In case she tries that again."

We race to keypad on the wall and I tell him the code.

"C.O.N.T.R.O.L. I watched a bodyguard type it in when they left."

When we get out of the room, the threesome is still walking down the hall. Time to ambush.

Chapter 6

"Hey Madison! Wanna see something you *can't* do?"

44 and I run down the hallway. I pull ahead and complete a front aerial, kicking the bodyguard on the left and making him drop his end of the chair. The chair comes crashing to the floor. I do my best to take out the bodyguards and leave Madison for 44.

With no staff and no other weapons, I have only my gymnastics know-how to guide me. The guards both have guns, which they are not using. If I can get my hands on one of those guns...

I hop on a guard's back. While he tries to bat me away, I grab the gun in his belt and shoot him in the in the leg. Not deadly, but it'll slow him down. I toss the gun to 44, but Madison catches it. 44 spins her around to kiss her with the poison lip balm and I feel that twinge of jealousy again and she shoots him in the arm just before passing out.

44 howls in pain and falls to the ground, bloody. I help him up.

"Shhh! We don't want anyone to hear us, remember?"

He cradles his arm. I scan the map on his watch to find a place where prisoners could be kept. The Prisoner Center is a good place. That's just around the corner, too. We walk briskly down the hall and turn. Through a pair of double doors is the concrete Prisoner Center. I look around to find Agent Knolls and the mission team, along with all of the Brookhurst teachers. Sure enough, they are in here, across the room from my position. All in one cell too. I sprint over to the cell and 44 walks.

"Hey guys! I'm here to rescue you!"

When 44 arrives, he hacks into the system. Within about five minutes, every door to the cells is open and the prisoners all run towards the exits, free at last. The people from Brookhurst, mission team and teachers, stay behind to thank us.

"Thank you, Jade and Evan. Let's get back to the academy, and then a formal thank you will be in order," admits Agent Knolls.

Just as we are beginning to leave, six men and women show up at the door and block our only exit. Not *again*!

"Not so fast. You thought you were going to leave without saying goodbye? How rude!"

The agents run at us, but we far overpower them, what with all the teachers plus the mission team and me. The Medical teacher tends to 44 while the rest of us fight. I spot one agent with a staff and immediately run towards her. I grab the side of the staff with both hands as she runs and kick up to land on her other side. Since she is still gripping it, I swing it end over end. She flips over it unintentionally and lands on her back on the floor. She swings around on the floor to kick my legs, but I take advantage of that and yank the staff from her hands.

"Watch out!" someone yells to me.

I place the staff on the ground and do an aerial while holding it to get away and someone shoots the woman I was battling.

It doesn't take long for us to overpower the Chaos agents, and we leave through the secret entrance only 44 knows how to open.

Chapter 7

Back at Brookhurst, I sleep the whole night and most of the next day. We have a family brunch, and then I take a shower and clean up. The facility is still surrounded by Chaos agents, but Chaos Academy is so busy rethinking their plan that they won't attack us yet. Today is the formal Thank You for 44 and me. I put my dress on early and go to the hospital building.

"You're looking fine," I tell 44.

"Thanks," he says, lying in a pristine white hospital bed.

"You never told me your name was Evan."

"You didn't ask."

He cracks a smile then winces in pain.

"You know, back at the assessments, Max and I were the only ones who voted for you."

"Really? Well I appreciate knowing that I only got two out of fourteen votes."

"I didn't mean it like that."

"It's okay. I know," I admit, "I'll see you at the ceremony. We spies do love to have parties."

"I'd like to welcome you all here to celebrate this joyous day," says Agent Knolls. "As you all know, recently we were captured by agents of evil. Agents of Chaos. And rising out of the dust, we have two bright shining stars. So without further ado, please put your hands together to welcome Agent 44 and Ms. Jade Lockhart!"

The audience cheers as Evan and I walk out onto the auditorium stage.

"Brookhurst Academy would like to thank you two for restoring us to our position. Even though the war between good and evil has not ended, you have put the war back in our hands, where it belongs. And now my friends, we must strike while the iron is hot! We must defend our home, our country, and our oceans from the evil clutches in which they might someday rest!"

The audience lets out another cheer. This ceremony of gratitude has turned into a call-to-arms.

“And finally, we will be adding another person to the mission team. Ms. Lockhart, will you please step forward?”

I do so and try to maintain a neutral face. I fail and a smile spreads across my lips.

“You have proven yourself worthy of the team with your skills in thinking outside the box and in self defense. These are just the qualities we look for. We will cherish and challenge your special ability of breaking and entering. Everyone, put your hands together for the newest addition to the mission team: Agent 99!”

The End