



spy school

PROJECT

X

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STUART GIBBS

spy school

PROJECT

X

A **spy school** NOVEL

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For the fabulous Kate Grant

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spy school

PROJECT

X

To: My Evil Friends around the World
From: Murray Hill

If you are receiving this email, then things have gone horribly wrong with my most recent evil plan. I set up my account to automatically send this email to all of you today unless I stopped it from transmitting. And since I haven't stopped it, that means we have a problem.

Yes, I said "we" there. Not just me. *All of us* have a problem.

His name is Benjamin Ripley.

I know Ripley is only a teenager, but he has already helped thwart many of your brilliant evil plans—and if he hasn't thwarted yours, then you certainly know someone whose plans he has thwarted. Frankly, I'm sick of it.

If it wasn't for Ripley, a lot of us would be very, very rich. But now, we're not. And to make matters worse, other bad things have befallen us. Some of us have been captured. Some have lost body parts. Some have very nearly died multiple times.

This has to stop. I have talked to all of you about Project X before. The time has come to initiate it.

If you are reading this email, consider yourselves activated.

May the best person win.

Your friend,

Murray Hill

P.S. Ben Ripley sucks!!!!

June 10

From: The Principal
To: Benjamin Ripley

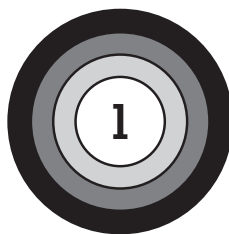
Benjamin—

I need to meet you at 1200 hours tomorrow. This is URGENT. And also REALLY IMPORTANT. The meeting will be in my office in the Hale Administration Building. (The office that you blew up at the beginning of the school year.)

I know that you will be busy with your final exams, but it is critical that you attend. Your life depends on it.

This meeting will be top secret. Tell no one about it. And destroy this message after reading it.

—The Principal



SELF-PRESERVATION

Lyman Gymnasium

The CIA's Academy of Espionage

Washington, DC

June 11

1200 hours

I had an emergency meeting with the principal.

As if finals at spy school weren't stressful enough.

I used to go to a normal middle school, so I'm aware that exam weeks everywhere are difficult, but ours was brutal. Not just mentally—but often physically as well.

For example, an algebra exam in regular middle school might have a few questions on working out parabolas—while an algebra exam at spy school entailed having live grenades

lobbed at you. The grenades were loaded with paint instead of explosives, so they would merely color you blue, rather than blow your limbs off, but still, the test was so traumatic, it frequently left students gibbering in fear. I'm lucky enough to be gifted in mathematics, and yet, there's a very big difference between doing a complex equation in a nice, quiet classroom as opposed to a muddy foxhole with paint-filled explosives raining down on you.

And that was one of the easier exams.

The most difficult was in Advanced Self-Preservation. It also happened to be the most painful.

Well, it wasn't painful if you were *good* at self-preservation. In that case, the exam could be rather hazardous for your instructor. But I wasn't good at self-preservation at all.

Everyone has their strengths. Mine happen to be more cerebral. I'm quite skilled at deducing what bad guys are plotting and then figuring out how to defeat them. This wasn't only in a classroom setting: I had faced *actual* bad guys a surprising number of times, given that I was only in my second year of spy school. Due to some extraordinary circumstances, I had managed to prevent evil organizations from dismantling the planet's electrical grid, destroying the Panama Canal, assassinating the president of the United States, and melting Antarctica. And that was just in the spring semester.

Unfortunately, at spy school, we didn't get good grades for successful missions. In fact, we still had to make up the homework we missed while we were away.

To be honest, I've gotten much better at self-preservation since coming to spy school. I could probably defeat the average person in a fight. But when you're a spy, you don't get attacked by *average* people. You have trained killers come after you. And so, to properly prepare us for the field, the exams in Advanced Self-Preservation were extremely difficult.

The final involved a little-known Tibetan style of martial arts known as Nook-Bhan-San, which loosely translates as "Wow, That *Really* Hurts." Each student had to fight one of the academy's many martial arts instructors. If we could defeat them, we would get an A. Personally, I felt that was highly unlikely. The best I could hope for was a D, which involved losing the fight, but not getting sent to the school infirmary.

I would have been nervous enough about the self-preservation exam on a normal day, but the impending meeting with the principal made everything worse. The principal had two basic personalities, angry and incompetent, and he tended to swing back and forth between them without any warning at all, so being with him was never a pleasant experience. He also had said that my life depended on this meeting, which made me even more anxious.

Then, to top things off, Professor Crandall had been late for the exam. Crandall was an elderly and doddering instructor with a big secret; in truth, he was very aware and capable, but only pretended to be in decline to throw off his enemies. (I was one of the few people who knew this, having learned of it during my first mission, and had sworn not to tell anyone.) Crandall was exceptionally good at the doddering act, and his lectures were famous for being incredibly boring and only vaguely coherent. In his final class of the semester, he had rambled on for a half hour about how to protect yourself against Vikings, even though the last time they had been a threat was 1000 AD.

The exam took place in the school gymnasium. Two students at a time were paired with instructors to fight. Crandall sat in the stands, ostensibly watching the proceedings, although he seemed to keep nodding off. (Like I said, he was a very good actor.) Normally, I would have been in no rush to get my butt kicked, but I was hoping to go early so that I could still make my meeting with the principal.

Instead, I was placed in the final pairing.

By then, I knew there was very little chance that I would get to the meeting on time, which would certainly incur the wrath of the principal. I never enjoyed incurring wrath, but the only way to be punctual would be to throw my exam. That would be extremely painful, and I enjoyed pain even less than

wrath. Also, I didn't want to get an F in self-preservation and have to take the course over again the next semester.

So I tried my best.

The student who was selected to compete at the same time as me was Zoe Zibbell.

For much of my time at spy school, Zoe had been my closest friend, although we had recently hit a bumpy patch. Zoe had thought that one of our fellow students had switched to working for the bad guys and had gone behind my back to try to have them arrested. Her intentions were good—although she was wrong about the other student—but I had felt betrayed. Zoe had apologized profusely, and I knew she meant it. Yet things were still awkward between us.

Zoe didn't look impressive physically, being small and slight of build, but she was a formidable fighter. Plus, her size sometimes worked to her advantage. Her opponent, a wiry, muscular instructor, had certainly been told not to underestimate her—and then he did it anyhow. In under a minute, Zoe had him pinned to the mat and howling in pain, an A-plus performance for sure.

My own exam didn't go nearly as well. I was matched against a young woman with muscles so taut, they looked like iron bands. I started out decently well, employing a Nook-Bhan-San move called "Fast as Lightning." This wasn't really an attack. Instead, I just darted about quickly in an

unpredictable pattern, hoping that my opponent might grow tired of chasing me around before she got the chance to hurt me. It wasn't the sort of technique that earned you an A, but then, it was a lot less painful than staying put and getting punched in the nose.

Unfortunately, my opponent responded with a move called "Even Faster Than Lightning" where she simply moved quicker than I did, then locked her hand around my wrist with the Grip of Extreme Stickiness and unleashed the Ordeal of a Thousand Smacks to the Face. I managed to slip free of her grasp with the Greased Snow Monkey, although my attempt to counterattack with the Fist of Annihilation failed miserably when she executed a perfect Evasive Yeti Maneuver and all I ended up punching was air.

But then, to my surprise, my opponent made a mistake. She shifted into the unmistakable stance of Pangolin Death Strike, for which the proper response was to drop to the floor and implement a Golden Jackal Leg Sweep. So I did it. In fact, it was the finest Golden Jackal Leg Sweep I had ever performed. There were sixteen separate movements, and I made each one of them perfectly.

Only, it didn't work. My opponent didn't perform the Pangolin Death Strike at all. Instead, she nimbly leapt out of the way of my leg sweep and dropped on top of me, driving her elbow into my solar plexus.

One moment, I thought I was about to win the match—and the next, I was pinned.

Professor Crandall came down from the stands, clucking his tongue in disappointment. “Oh, Benjamin, you walked right into that one. In dropping to the floor, you left yourself wide open for the lethal Here Comes the Avalanche move.”

“But you never taught us about the Here Comes the Avalanche move!” I protested. “That’s not fair!”

“When you’re on a mission, the bad guys are rarely going to play fair,” Crandall informed me. “You need to be prepared for *anything*. I’m afraid I’ll have to give you a D minus for that performance.”

“But . . . ,” I spluttered, peeling myself off the floor. “That was my best Golden Jackal Leg Sweep ever!”

“Perhaps so, but this is Advanced Self-Preservation, not Interpretive Dance. In a real-life fight, you don’t get points for style. And if you lose, you end up dead. Oh goodness, there appears to be a slice of cheese in my pocket.” Crandall removed what was, in fact, a slice of cheese from his fleece vest and looked at it in wonderment, as if its presence was one of the great mysteries of the universe.

At this moment, I began to question how much of Professor Crandall’s doddering act was an act and how much was actual doddering.

I really wanted to stay and argue that I deserved a better

grade than a D minus, but I reluctantly had to admit that Professor Crandall had made a valid argument about what real-life fights were like—and I was now late for my meeting with the principal.

“I have to go,” I said.

“Have a nice summer!” Crandall told me cheerfully, then nibbled the cheese he’d discovered and exclaimed, “Ooh! It’s Havarti! My favorite!”

I grabbed my backpack and headed for the door, moving a little slower than I’d intended, as I was still aching from the Here Comes the Avalanche.

Zoe dropped in beside me, doing her best to act like her extremely supportive pre-betrayal self. “That was really uncool of Crandall just now. You performed one of the best Golden Jackal Leg Sweeps I’ve seen all semester!”

“Maybe, but Crandall’s right about what it’s like in the field.”

“Yeah. I guess you would know.” There was a great deal of jealousy in Zoe’s voice. She had recently managed to land an internship with the Double Agent Detection Division, which hadn’t turned out to be nearly as exciting as she’d hoped. “While I was stuck working for DADD, you got to go to Central America and prevent a cruise ship from exploding.”

“I nearly got killed on that mission,” I reminded her. “Multiple times.”

"I know. You're so lucky." This statement wasn't said with the slightest bit of sarcasm. Zoe really meant it. "Was this your last exam?"

"Yeah."

"Mine too. Are you heading back to the dorm to pack for spy camp?"

Normally, that's what I *would* have been doing. We were scheduled to begin our summer of wilderness training in a few days. However, I couldn't tell Zoe about my meeting with the principal, as it was classified. All I could say was, "In a bit. But I have to do something else first."

"Like what?" Zoe asked suspiciously.

We exited the gymnasium into Hammond Quadrangle. It was a glorious late spring day. The sun was shining, and yet, there wasn't a trace of the usual wilting humidity that Washington, DC, was famous for. The lawn of the quad was lush and green and fringed with flowers. Many of our fellow students were reveling in being done with their exams—playing frisbee, kicking soccer balls, or basking in the sun.

"Just a meeting," I said. "With an adviser."

Zoe gave me a doubtful look. "What is it really? A top secret conference? Are you being sent on *another* mission?"

"No! I swear."

"I bet. You're probably going to get air-dropped onto

Mount Everest to defuse a nuclear bomb or something amazing like that.”

“Defusing nuclear bombs isn’t amazing. It’s terrifying.”

“Well, I wouldn’t know, would I? I haven’t ever gotten to do it. But you have. Like four times.”

“Only two of the bombs I defused were nuclear.”

“Do you even hear yourself? Do you realize how fortunate you are? Most students don’t get to defuse a bomb until their sixth year here—and those are just pretend ones for class. On your last mission, you got to disarm a real nuke, go undercover in exotic locations, *and* chase a speedboat on a WaveRunner! That’s awesome! All I ever get to do at DADD is staple expense reports together.”

I was about to counter Zoe’s argument, but didn’t for two reasons.

First, that WaveRunner chase had actually been pretty cool.

Second, the principal was coming across the quad toward me.

It was easy to see him approaching, as all the other students were giving him a wide berth. He looked even angrier than usual, so everyone was behaving as though he was radioactive, hurrying out of his path.

In addition, he hadn’t bothered to put his toupee on properly. Even on good days, his hairpiece looked like a

mangy badger camped out on his head, but today it seemed he'd forgotten it even existed, so it was completely askew, leaving a good portion of his bald, sweaty brow gleaming in the sunlight.

"You!" he exclaimed upon seeing me, and then pointed a thick, meaty finger my way. "You have a lot of nerve, Ripley!"

All around the quad, I noticed my fellow students experiencing dual emotions: genuine concern for my well-being—and relief that the principal wasn't angry at *them*.

While I had feared the principal would be upset at me for being late to the meeting, the level of fury in his eyes was far greater than I had expected. Still, I did my best to explain as he approached. "Sir, I'm very sorry that I kept you waiting. My exam in self-preservation went long . . ."

"That's true!" Zoe added, even though she knew this was risking the anger of the principal. "You can ask Professor Crandall yourself! He's right over there!" She pointed back to the gymnasium. Crandall had just exited the building, although he seemed preoccupied, clutching a kosher pickle with bemusement. I suspected he had recently discovered it in another one of his pockets.

"What are you even talking about?" the principal snapped at me. "I'm not angry about you being late! I'm angry about *this*!" He thrust a handwritten note in my face.

It read:

*To the principal,
You are a jerk, a buffoon, a
numbskull, a dolt, and a fathead.
Also, you smell like a diseased
pustule on the butt of a wildebeest.
I'll be in the quad if you'd like to
discuss this further.
Sincerely,
Ben Ripley*

Many things were strange about this letter, but the most startling to me was that it was in my own handwriting. If I hadn't known better, I would have believed that I had actually written it.

"This was wrapped around a rock and thrown into my office five minutes ago!" the principal proclaimed.

It usually would have been quite difficult to throw a rock into the principal's office, as it was on the top floor of the Nathan Hale Building, five stories above the quad. However, the exterior wall of the office was currently missing, having been demolished the previous September by an errant mortar round. (I was the one who had fired it, although it wasn't really my fault; still, the principal remained annoyed at me for it, which was compounded by the fact that red tape had prevented any repairs from getting done, leaving a gaping hole in the building for the entire school year.) But while this made it *possible* for someone to throw a rock into his office, it

still wouldn't have been easy; if I had tried to do it, I probably would have missed the fifth floor entirely and put a rock through one of the lower-level windows instead.

"I checked our handwriting database!" the principal continued indignantly. "This is your handwriting, isn't it?"

"Er . . . yes," I admitted. "But someone must have forged it! Why would I write something like that?"

"Because you're an insolent little pip-squeak!" the principal shouted. "I have half a mind to boot you out of this school!"

"You only have half a mind, period," Zoe muttered under her breath, too low for him to hear.

"This doesn't make any sense," I said to the principal. "I was coming to see *you* for our meeting. So I wouldn't have—"

"What meeting?" the principal demanded. "I didn't schedule any meeting with you today!"

I took a step back, confused. "You didn't send me a message about it yesterday?"

"Absolutely not! And if I *was* going to meet with you, it certainly wouldn't be in my office!"

"Why not?"

"Because you destroyed my office!"

"That wasn't Ben's fault . . .," Zoe began.

The principal ignored her and kept glaring at me. "Because of you, I have spent the last eight months working

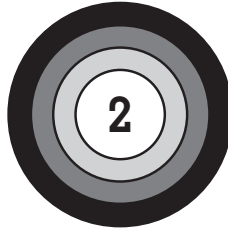
at a desk made of two sawhorses and a piece of plywood! But I was finally able to requisition a *real* desk. It was delivered yesterday, and it's beautiful. It's big, expensive, and expertly crafted—and I'm not letting you anywhere near it, Ripley. You're a menace! If you got anywhere near that desk, I'm sure it would catch fire or explode or get eaten by a shark!"

"I think that's all highly unlikely," I said.

"I don't," the principal declared. "Not only are you insubordinate, you're also a walking disaster area."

"That's not true," I insisted.

At which point, the principal's office exploded.



EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Hammond Quadrangle

Academy of Espionage

June 11

1215 hours

The explosion was as loud as a rocket blast.

An enormous ball of fire erupted from the principal's office. A large, dark flaming object sailed through the place where the wall should have been, tumbled through the air, and then thudded into the center of the quadrangle, leaving a crater the size of a small car.

"My new desk!" the principal shrieked.

A few seconds earlier, it had probably been as beautiful and expertly crafted as he'd claimed. But now it was battered,

broken, and on fire. The principal and I both stared at it in horror, although for entirely different reasons.

The principal was upset because his cherished new desk was ruined. Whereas I was concerned because if I had been on time for my meeting, then both the principal and I would have been in his office during the explosion, rather than out in the quad. I quickly calculated how large a blast was needed to hurl a heavy desk such a great distance and instantly concluded that there was no way we would have survived it.

Zoe seemed to be thinking the same thing. “Looks like someone’s trying to kill you,” she told me, sincerely worried, then thought to add, “Again.”

Alarms began wailing all around campus. There was an elaborate emergency evacuation system at the academy, which we had to practice with regularity. While my normal middle school had occasionally run fire drills, spy school had drills for fire, poison gas, aerial assaults, insurrections, coup d’états, and bombings. Each had a different pattern of alarms, which signaled how students were to evacuate. The current pattern, two short bursts, followed by two long ones, indicated a bombing.

My fellow students at the academy were, for the most part, exceptionally intelligent and competent. They responded to the alarms quickly and capably, doing exactly what was

mandated: evacuating the school buildings and heading into the quadrangle.

The reason for this course of action was sensible: In the case of a bombing, it was dangerous to be indoors, as buildings could collapse, while the quad was a large, empty space, easily accessible from all parts of campus. Within seconds, students and faculty poured out of the buildings and onto the lawn—and then gaped in surprise at the flaming desk in the center of it.

With one exception. Professor Crandall tossed his pickle aside and quickly headed down a path that led away from the quadrangle.

Something strange was going on, and it seemed to me that Crandall was connected to it. It was highly suspicious that the principal and I had received contradictory messages from each other shortly before the explosion, and now Crandall, apparently thinking no one was watching him, had completely dropped his doddering act. He strode away from the quadrangle briskly and purposefully, rather than with his usual shambling gait.

I went after him.

Zoe followed me, intrigued, while the principal also followed, still angry at me.

“What’s going on?” Zoe asked me, at the same time that

the principal said, "Not so fast, young man! I'm not done with you yet!"

I ignored the principal and tried to deflect Zoe's question. "Nothing's going on."

"Don't lie to me, Ben. Someone just tried to blow you up and now you're fleeing the scene. Tell me what's happening. I can help."

Before I could respond, three more friends of mine emerged from the growing crowd of students on the quad. Mike Brezinski raced toward us from Armistead Dormitory, clutching a gas mask, while Chip Schacter and Jawa O'Shea came from the mess hall.

Mike was my closest friend from *real* middle school, who had grown wise to the fact that I'd been recruited to the Academy of Espionage, even though it was supposed to be a secret. That, combined with Mike's tendency to think outside the box, had earned him not only his own acceptance to spy school, but also a spot on my most recent missions.

Chip was a few years older than me, a student more recognized for his brawn than his brains; it was often useful to have some muscle on a mission, although Chip was also capable of having surprising insights now and then. Jawa was the best all-around student in my class, extremely adept mentally and physically. He should have been the student going

on missions, rather than me, but life had simply worked out differently.

“What’s happening, Ben?” Chip asked.

“Yeah,” Mike echoed. “How are you connected to the explosion?”

“What makes you think I’m connected to the explosion?” I asked.

“You’re connected to *everything* weird that happens around here,” Jawa said. “Ergo, if someone blows up the principal’s office, you must be involved somehow.”

“Exactly!” the principal agreed. “I’m holding you personally responsible for that desk, Ripley!”

“Why are you carrying a gas mask?” Zoe asked Mike.

“I got the alarm bells mixed up,” Mike replied. “I couldn’t remember if that was the alert for bombs or gas attacks, so I figured, better safe than sorry.”

“It took me eight months to requisition that desk,” the principal was grumbling. “It had custom detailing and built-in cup holders for my coffee . . .”

“So why are we leaving the quad?” Chip asked me.

I thought about making up a lie, but then decided against it. First of all, I hated lying to my friends. Second, Zoe had been right—they could help. After all, someone had just tried to kill me. It was probably better not to be

on my own. Plus, I had lost track of Professor Crandall.

We had arrived at the edge of the quadrangle, between the armory and the chemical warfare building, only to find that Crandall was nowhere in sight.

“We need to find Professor Crandall,” I told the others. “He just came this way.”

“Crandall?” Chip asked disdainfully. “What do we want with that old coot? Last week, in the mess hall, I saw him putting oatmeal in his hat.”

“He’s not as senile as he seems,” I said.

“You think he’s behind the bombing?” Mike asked, sounding worried. Quite a few students at spy school had turned out to be double agents, so it was certainly possible that a faculty member could too.

Of course, none of them knew Crandall the way I did. I would have bet that even the principal wasn’t aware of Crandall’s facade—although, the principal wasn’t aware of much in general; he didn’t even notice that his toupee had migrated halfway off his head and now looked like a large rodent clinging to his left ear.

“I’m not sure *what* to think,” I said. “That’s why we need to find him.”

While we had been talking, Jawa had dropped into a crouch and was inspecting the ground closely. He had been the best student by far in our Tailing and Tracking class and

was now obviously looking for clues as to where Crandall had gone. “Got him!” he announced triumphantly. “There are slight indentations in the grass indicating someone walked across here only moments ago. The pattern shows someone moving at a swift pace, and there’s a faint odor of salami and liniment.”

“That’s Crandall, all right,” Zoe agreed. “The man has a salami sandwich for lunch every single day. Where’d he go?”

“This way!” Jawa sprang to his feet, following the trail, which led across a grassy expanse to a large grove of trees alongside the school artillery range. As we ducked into it, we could hear Crandall’s voice. “All right. I’m here. What have you got?”

Since Chip and Jawa were the best athletes, they reached Crandall slightly before the rest of us. He was at the base of an extremely tall elm tree, speaking into a radio microphone and seeming far more lucid than usual—although the moment he saw Chip and Jawa, he went right back into his doddering act. “Skip and Yaya! Thank goodness you boys are here. I seem to have lost my way to the bathroom . . .” He trailed off as I arrived with the others and suddenly became cogent again. “Oh, fiddlesticks. Hello, Benjamin.”

“What’s going on here?” I asked.

“And who is going to pay for my desk?” the principal added.

Crandall gave me an annoyed look. "I really wish you'd come alone."

"And I really wish you'd told me what you were planning before I nearly got blown up."

"Wait a minute," Chip said to Crandall. "You're not a loony bird? That was all an act?"

Crandall ignored him to answer me. "Keeping you in the dark wasn't my call. That was up to the leader of the operation."

From the way he said those words, I instantly knew who he was talking about.

Erica Hale.

Erica was by far the best student at spy school. Next to her, even Jawa didn't stand a chance. But then, Erica had been training to be a spy much longer than any of the rest of us; it was her family business, going all the way back to the Hales of the American Revolution. Most of her direct ancestors had been spies for America, while her mother was an agent for British MI6.

Erica was also the fellow student that Zoe had mistakenly suspected of being a double agent. Which made things prickly between them.

And she was my girlfriend. Sort of.

I had been smitten with Erica from the moment I met her. She had not felt the same way about me, believing that

relationships were a mistake in the spy business—and that I was a buffoon. However, after nine missions together, I had managed to change her mind on both counts. Erica had finally agreed to try dating—although that was tempered by the fact that she didn't know a thing about romance. The first time we had gone out, which was just a walk to get ice cream, I had tried to buy her a rose from a street vendor, and Erica had promptly cited the poor woman for operating without a proper florist's license.

"Where is she?" I asked Crandall.

He pointed directly up.

The elm we stood beside towered high above the canopy of the other trees around it. I immediately realized that a person situated in its upper branches would have a clear view of the entire campus—and possibly the surrounding city as well.

The thick foliage of the trees surrounding the elm hid Erica from view. If Crandall hadn't tipped me off, I would never have known she was there.

"What's she doing up there?" Mike asked, tilting his head back in an attempt to see her.

"Hunting the hunter," Crandall replied dramatically, then looked to me. "Yesterday, Erica received a tip that your life might be in danger, so she came to me . . ."

"Why didn't she come to *me*?" I asked, failing to keep the panic from my voice.

“To avoid this very reaction, I believe. She didn’t want to upset you if she didn’t have to. She presumed that anyone targeting you might have access to your email, so she concocted the plan to arrange a fake meeting for you and the principal and then asked me to make sure you were late. Then she forged the note from you and threw it into the principal’s office to get him to leave, just in case there was an attack.”

“She couldn’t think of another way to handle this?” the principal groused angrily. “A way that didn’t involve destroying my new desk?!”

“This way worked,” Crandall said calmly. “And better yet, it’s allowed Erica to potentially track the assassin.”

“Through radio frequencies!” Jawa exclaimed knowingly. “If the assassin used a radio to trigger the bomb, then Erica could track the signal from up there and pinpoint the location it was transmitted from!”

“Correct,” Crandall said.

The loose end of a climbing rope suddenly plunged through the canopy above us, followed by the sound of someone crashing through the branches. We all stepped aside as Erica rappelled down the trunk of the elm at top speed. She was dressed in her usual garb for action, a form-fitting black outfit accented with a utility belt, although at the moment, she also had green greasepaint on her face to camouflage her from view.